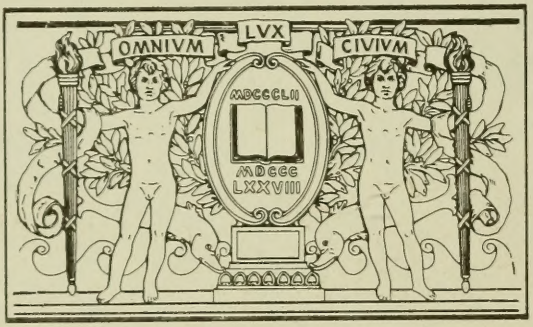
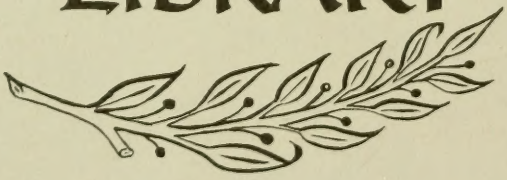
ODD, OR EVEN?

MRS A. D. T. WHITNEY



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ODD, OR EVEN?

BY

MRS. A. D. T. WHITNEY,

AUTHOR OF "THE GAYWORTHYS," "HITHERTO," "SIGHTS AND INSIGHTS,"
THE "REAL FOLKS" SERIES, ETC., ETC.



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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Between	5
II.	So Queer!	13
III.	Farm-Yard and Kitchen	22
IV.	Polite to a Butterfly	35
V.	Hide and Go Seek	44
VI.	Hay-Swaths and High Courtesy	48
VII.	Sarell and East Hollow	54
VIII.	Good at a Hold-back	63
IX.	The East Room at East Hollow	68
X.	The Great Pyramid	81
XI.	Brackets and Interlines	91
XII.	The Red Quarries	97
XIII.	How Much More does It take?	102
XIV.	Mountain Fogs and Clear-running Waters	109
XV.	In the Ring or on the Road?	135
XVI.	The Hay Parlor	140
XVII.	The Dam Pasture	151
XVIII.	The Power and the Parts	174
XIX.	A World for Me	193
XX.	Night and Morning	203
XXI.	Sunday, and a Sermon	213
XXII.	Monday	231
XXIII.	Plans, a Plot, and a Pleading	240
XXIV.	Day-Dawn in the Dairy	255
XXV.	It must take care of Itself	261
XXVI.	"Not Half Good Enough"	266

CHAP.		PAGE
XXVII.	"Old Thunder"	273
XXVIII.	The Sense of It	284
XXIX.	Crowned Head	290
XXX.	Safeguards	313
XXXI.	Bolts and Bonds	327
XXXII.	Cash and Investment	340
XXXIII.	"Walking Pride"	348
XXXIV.	Hobgoblins	355
XXXV.	Shows and Disquiets	366
XXXVI.	Drift	376
XXXVII.	Twenty Questions	383
XXXVIII.	The Prodigal Daughter	391
XXXIX.	Benedicite	396
XL.	Quit-Claim	401
XLI.	Number Nine	408
XLII.	The Free-Will Chance	419
XLIII.	Mother Pemble's Ultimatum	432
XLIV.	Sarell gives Odds and comes out Even	441
XLV.	Nine from Nought, and Fellaiden News	462
XLVI.	"Those Dozen Years of Ours"	474
XLVII.	Chimes	481
XLVIII.	Outside with a Dark Lantern	488
XLIX.	Rose-Glories	497
L.	The Best Word	503

ODD, OR EVEN?

CHAPTER I.

BETWEEN.

"MIDDLE-CLASS! I've no patience!" said Miss Ammah, with her nose nearly horizontal. "We're all middle-class. We're all between somebody and somebody else. But you need n't be middling. It's only middling that's mean, anywhere."

"And yet, Miss Ammah, your grocer's family —"

"Grocer? What's a grocer? Look in your Webster. Your father's a grocer."

"Why, Miss Ammah! Papa sells *cargoes*."

Miss Ammah was great on etymologies. "What his vessels are charged with, that is?"

"Of course — I suppose so." The two first words came at once, the last three dubiously and slower; as if the girl, between her periods, mistrusted that she might be jumping into a trap.

"And Mr. Raxley sells what his warehouse is charged with. Where's the difference?"

Euphemia spoke now. It had been Helen before.

"Papa studies the world," she said proudly. "He brings things over the seas. The other man takes what he brings and sells it over a counter."

"The other man studies his neighborhood and what his neighbors want; but you have reason, Euphemia. Only they both stand between; that is what I said. And it is a round and round. Nobody is actually bottom and nobody is actually top, any more than they are on the globe."

"And yet there is a top and a bottom and a between to everything that exists on the globe," said Frances, — "society,

schools, families. I know, for I 'm a between ; and that 's why nobody settles or thinks where I 'm to go this summer. Phemie and Helen have got invitations, — they always have, — and the little ones are to go with mamma ; but I 'm skipped, so far. I suppose I shall be perceived and picked up, somehow, in the packing, as other odds and ends are. Not that I 'm an end," she corrected herself, saving her unities of speech, "only an odd, — number five, tucked in at the middle."

Nobody minded Frances and her queer sayings. She was always an odd, as she declared.

"This does n't settle the calling," said Euphemia. "I don't know why we should worry to return a visit that was altogether accidental, any way, when we can't keep up the acquaintance, and there are loads of people we really do know, and owe to. We shall never get round."

"That comes of taking your friendships in cargoes," quoth Miss Ammah.

"And of being so lovely to the accidentals when you did n't mean anything continuing ; practising the high bred that is too high bred to be sniffy, when you 're going to turn out sniffy after all," said uncompromising, clear-sighted France. "For my part, I 'd rather go see the Raxleys any day than the Talfreys. But why can't we be like the planets ? " she concluded suddenly, with the utmost freshness of simple suggestion, and looking up innocently, as she paused for information.

"Don't be utterly nonsensical ! " said Euphemia impatiently. She thought France meant something about being high and established enough in the firmament to shine on all alike ; and if there was anything Euphemia could not bear, it was the slightest hint that there was any effort in their social life, or that they needed to be "like" anybody.

"Am I ? " asked France meekly. "I was only thinking that they never go out of their orbits. They just let the conjunctions come about as the way leads and the time comes round. Why can't people keep on their own ways, and meet and be pleasant when it happens so ? Why must there be duty calls ? so called because duty is exactly — "

"Now don't quote Lucus — "

"I 'm not going to. Don't do it yourself."

"Don't you really know what you are going to do with yourself, — what you're going to be done with, — this summer, France?" Miss Ammah shook her head at the maid offering her a superfluous hot waffle, pushed her chair back from the table, and turned her face suddenly toward Frances, where she sat with the cat in her lap, teasing its ears.

"No, ma'am."

"Then come with me up to Fellaiden."

France had brought it down upon her now, the others thought. Neither Helen nor Euphemia would have gone to Fellaiden to pass the summer for anything. There was a dead silence in the room for forty seconds, partly because all of them were also struck with wonder at the invitation itself; since Miss Ammah, able to monopolize and pay for it, had held on to Fellaiden as a monopoly for the last five years. She had discovered it; she paid seven dollars a week for her board, where the price was only five, and had everything her own comfortable way there: hence, she was not disposed to open it to irruptions and demoralizations, even when her especial friends intimated how much they should like to come up for a few weeks, if there would be room for them. Upon the silence the door opened, and Mrs. Everidge, the mother of the young ladies, came in.

"Mamma," cried France, "Miss Ammah wants me to go up to Fellaiden with her this summer. Do you suppose she means it?"

Miss Ammah took up her knitting from a basket on the étagère, and left them to settle it.

"How should you like it?" asked Mrs. Everidge, used to the family friend's original ways.

"Middling," said France demurely.

"There 's nothing middling, you 'll find, at Fellaiden, France Everidge," said Miss Ammah. "Yes, there is, too; it 's two miles up a three-mile hill."

"A funny kind of middling," said Helen.

"It 's their kind," said Miss Ammah.

"I 'll go," said France. "I never got so far up in the world

as that. It 's just the step beyond for me. There 's a fate in it. Only the middle will be dropped out of *this* family, and they 'll miss it. They 'll be all old ones and little ones, and nobody to fall back on or be handed over to. I am sorry for the Everidges."

You notice she had not thanked Miss Ammah at all for her invitation. That was simply because Miss Ammah always hated to be thanked.

I wish to moralize in about three lines. A mean condition in life, between any two in genuine order, is not contemptible, as Miss Ammah has said. *The* mean condition is to feel middling, and to refuse the fact. Then comes pretence to the fact one considers beyond, and that is the meanest condition of all.

The Everidges were a nice family, pleasant among themselves, and with much possibility of pleasantness outward from among themselves. They were only in danger of being spoiled by the thing that Miss Ammah attacked, and I have put in a moral. For though papa did study the world, and bring things from over seas, — which was rather a grand way of expressing that he owned two or three barques and schooners, among other things, and brought sugars and coffees from wherever in South America or the West Indies he could buy and load from largest and cheapest crops; that he received consignments of finer specialties from the Mediterranean, and even the far East; that he had invested in a Florida orange-grove since the war, and made a good deal of money every winter, for the first few years, on the trips of the Foambell to the St. Johns, — and though, besides all this, he had, like the rest of the world, after the big Rebellion let all latent rebellions loose, slidden from his old-fashioned, steady, inherited business into the nominalities, and made lucky dips into stocks and bonds, — as lucky withdrawals, also, by that rare instinct of probabilities which gets ahead of storms in trade, as the calculators at Washington get ahead with their cautions of the wheel and march of cyclones, — and so had stood for a keen man and a bold operator among business men, and represented to his family and immediate dependents and admirers all the kingdom of the commercial world and the glory of it, — this was not the whole of possible height

or sure-fast place, and they all knew it. It was a way and a help to something, but it was a thing of to-day in itself, and to-morrow might change it. Rather, even, was it not already, in essential respects, the thing of yesterday, which the hard, uncertain, shifting to-day was fast changing from all established centre and solid, confident advance?

"Papa studied the world." They had learned that by heart, and to be proud of it, almost in their babyhood; but the world had been something of a queer, uncertain book to study in the later times, with the whirling of its leaves in the wind, and the shutting down of chapter after chapter, till it seemed as if the whole volume of the current order of things were to be closed up, perhaps; and men, missing the old lines and connections, felt themselves failing in their hearts for fear, as the cross readings turned to threatening prophecies.

Mr. Everidge held on through the depression and the closing in: that was all the bravest and the strongest could do. That, for him, gave standing and honor of itself; he was as proud of that as he had been of his push and energy in the time passed by. The household and social life went on, if not altogether as it had done in the gay, lavish days, yet without fear of stop or any pinching stint; and the measure and the consciousness of the life went on with it. It was still the measure and consciousness of a making, as Mr. Everidge had made his money by enterprise fresh in the memory of all. It was not complete, asserted beyond assertion: it depended much on the continuance of the external condition that would let it go on making, and fulfil its chance before its chance should fail. Above was something that had been born, not made; had been large and assured in all its generations; that waited now, under loss and pressure, as a thing distinct from all such circumstance; that had become a little more withdrawn and difficult, instead of less, during the quietness of days adverse.

Money, its elusive unreality so newly and everywhere proved, was, even where apparently retained, hardly the passport that it had been. People did not want brilliant strangers with passports now: there was a reversion to the natural-born and long-abiding. The stand must at least be upon some high sort

of verity and growth. Towards such stand, for whose attainment fair time is needful, and on their way to which the hard time checked people just where they happened to be, if it did not send them absolutely rolling down again, the Everidges were still conscious of precisely that slight upward strain that is a pleasure in its successful putting forth, but becomes a pain when it has to halt and hold its own. It told them that, broad as the brow of the hill might be, and almost insensible its gracious slope about the crown, they were yet on the slope, not the apex, — between that and the ruggeder dividing ridges and drops below; so, in a sense, middling, as Miss Ammah said. But when Miss Ammah put it into words, it made them, — the elder ones, — as we have seen, a little fractious in their feeling.

France, the very middle individual of them all, with two sisters just older and taking the gloss off her dream of life by trying everything first and handing back the remnants to her, and two younger who demanded her time and her clothes faster than she could spare them, cared less, I think, for the collective middlingness than any of them. In fact, she was getting the beginning of certain theories of her own, rather rebellious against society; so that Euphemia said to Mrs. Everidge, after the Fellaiden plan had been decided, "There is one thing, mamma: she will come home worse than ever about her calls and her politeness, after Miss Ammah and the farm people."

Perhaps here, in a couple of paragraphs, I had better tell you who Miss Ammah is.

Her name — the rest of it — is Tredgold. She has n't a near relative in all the world, but she is family confidante and adviser and bosom friend to a score of families. And she won't be breveted "Aunt." She is always, among these friends, Miss Ammah. She visits in town and out of town. She knows bankers and bakers. In the pretty suburb where the Everidge "Place" has been set up, she runs up and down, and is welcome, from Pine Hills to the "Corner" village. Within this distance are the usual gradings and shadings of suburban family and neighborhood, from the old people whose estates, in the time of the grandfathers, had been cut through by the first turnpike, to the newcomers into the last French-roofed, turreted,

modern-convenienced dwelling on the last street laid out nearest the city limit, and built upon in a hurry, with one idea for twenty houses, just before the pulse of the annexation fever, six or seven years ago, went down.

Miss Ammah Tredgold does not "live upon her friends." On the contrary, her friends live so much upon her that she can only plead one visiting engagement against another as any excuse; and a dozen households are ill-used in their feelings if she ventures to stay more than a fortnight at a time at her own handsome moorings in Hotel Berkeley. Her sole chance of any soleness is her yearly hegira to the hills of Fellaiden.

She disappears with the dropping of the crocuses and daffodils, sometimes with the last snowflakes even, and is only known to have disappeared into a region where few citizens or suburbans would be tempted, if they could, to follow her; and is spoken of as in the fastnesses, "somewhere." They all know that, wherever it is, there is nothing going on there; it isn't "a place," at all, only a nook for one. She is as safe as a fox in her burrow. And now it was decided that France, the odd one of the Everidges, should disappear with her. About this there were already several minds in the family, — several minds in the parental mind, — although it was, as I have said, at once decided.

The minds began to come out that same afternoon, when Miss Ammah had gone up to the Pines to stay her promised three days with the Johneses. It would be told of there, and it could n't well be taken back now, but it would remain to be accounted for. For the Everidges held themselves, in some tacit and mystical fashion, as bound to account to the Johneses and the Talfreys and the Sindons — to say nothing of the Pyes whom I will speak of separately, presently — for all their new movements, as on some basis of reason recognizable to orthodox society; to show cause, of course all tacitly, and by way of merest natural and graceful mention, of their own whys, — why a Johnes or a Talfrey or a Sindon would have done likewise in the circumstance. They were bound — the Everidges — to run against no circumstance even that might not as well lie in these other people's way; else the Everidge way was obviously

divergent, here and there, from the way of the *haute volée*, and was no high flight at all. It had not yet occurred to them that, in the great firmament, a different way, that might be a yet higher flight, was possible.

"It will lose France out of everything for four months," said Helen; and then Euphemia added the remark about the calls and the politeness.

"But it is Miss Ammah," said their mother. "And France isn't really out yet, you know."

"But she ought to be in the way to be out, oughtn't she? And as to Miss Ammah, — well, people have her for a week or two at a time, and it 's the fashion to pull caps for her for that much: but whether anybody would go off and shut themselves up with her for *all summer?* I just wish it were n't a little, five-dollar, up-country, nobody-knows-where farmhouse! It *seems* rather like tucking poor France off out of our way. And she 's too old to do that with, and it 's an exploded idea of the third-rate society novels, and I don't half like it!" Euphemia said it pettishly, as people say things that it is no use to say; and snapped her Iceland wool, as she pulled the thread from the middle of the ball.

"You should n't wind your wool at all," observed Helen. "If you had 'dropped' it, you would n't have lost your thread."

"It should n't have been either hollow-wound or dropped," said Euphemia, "but loose-balled over-hand. Miss Ammah did it for me."

Miss Ammah, it was to be confessed, was not always alongside of the latest-accepted ways; and even in winding wools there is a latest-accepted.

CHAPTER II.

SO QUEER !

MEANWHILE, France had put on her hat, and taken some club-books which were to go next in order to those ladies, and walked over to the Miss Pyes'.

The Miss Pyes lived in a Bird's Nest. They had taken the name and the notion half a lifetime ago from Miss Bremer's famous *Hellevi Hausgiebel*, and had been carrying it out ever since "The Neighbors" was translated, and they — in their teens and twenties — had read it. They never considered the joke of its being called the Pyes' Nest, as of course it was immediately; or, if they thought of it, it was of an appositeness, not a satire. They never thought, even, of the appositeness of their own names, Christian and family. I suppose they never had the least idea how they were literally and continually illustrating them. Old-fashioned names of aunts and grandmothers, piously perpetuated — really, I meant no play on *that* word — from generation to generation, and kept on record in the columns of queer, varied hand-script between Malachi and Matthew in the family Bible.

Charity, and Barbara, and Margaret. Diminished to Chat and Bab and Mag among themselves, and even when they spoke of each other; in the most innocent confidence that they were nevertheless, as they were always politely addressed, "Miss Pye," "Miss Barbara," and "Miss Margaret" when spoken of in general society outside. Also, it never occurred to them that "Mag" and "Pye" by any chance, got hyphened together on common lips, having no occasion to get hyphened together at home. In reality, they were most often alluded to and quoted under the formula used by Miss Margaret herself, — who, being the youngest of the sisters and the most active member of so-

ciety, at once represented, gathered for, and voiced them all, — as "Chat and Bab and I."

Everything bright, curious, entertaining, — in things, talk, fact, — was collected at the Pyes' Nest. Mag did most of the collecting, as I have said; then they all fluttered and placed and admired sidewise, and chattered and babbled over the straws and sixpences, objective and metaphorical, that she had picked up. No malice about these last; only they thoroughly discussed everything in their bird fashion, and came to their conclusions; held caucus and made platform, so to say, and were ready with their verdict, — no insignificant one, for that old record between Malachi and Matthew was thoroughly honored and clear-traced, away back to some Pye who had chanced to light on the Mayflower or the Speedwell, and come over with the Pilgrims.

"We all think, Chat and Bab and I." The summing-up was circulated, as the details had been collected, by Miss Mag, in her little afternoon hoppings and perchings among the Pines and about the Corner.

So to take the social bull by the horns was to start a fact, equipped as you meant it to be, from the Pyes' Nest.

France Everidge fully intended now to go to Fellaiden. The plan had begun between breakfast and after-dinner to look specifically attractive to her. It had also begun during dinner discussions to lean down, as it were, on its weak side. Miss Ammah was not there to keep it up, and the weight of the little family doubts, with their half expression — a reflex beforehand of the "way it might seem" — was gathering, unbalanced, like freezing mist upon the windward side of a bough. Nobody thought of actually opposing or interdicting, — that would not be done, France knew, with Miss Ammah's already virtually accepted proposal, — but the cold-water spray of half-satisfaction was flung upon it, and was growing solid, particle by particle, and might somehow break it down. To help that, it must have broad sunshine let upon it. France, with a wise instinct rather than any deliberate management, held her peace against the ifs and buts, took all the previous settlement for granted, and remembered her errand to Miss Chat and Bab.

We are going off to Fellaiden with our heroine, so it is possible we may not, in the whole progress of our tale, whose course cannot at the outset be altogether predicted, "peek in" again so leisurely at the Pyes' Nest. The more, not the less, reason that we should take a discriminative look at it now, as France sits there with the three ladies, to whom the world has begun to look elderly, but with a certain curious sense of themselves having stopped somewhere a score of years ago to observe from a fixed point the outside process. Now and then Miss Bab would discern in a mild way that a winter influenza, or a depressing summer heat, had pulled Chat down a little, and that she ought to have the wine of iron for a while, and take to the glass of milk at lunch, — "that always do set you up again, you know"; or she would remark anxiously, even of Margaret, who kept about on her feet, and brought in a certain open-air bloom with her from her daily outgoings, that her color was n't quite what it ought to be in the mornings, and that she had a bad way of settling down into her pillow that "slept creases into her cheeks." But it never seemed to occur to her that there was anything in the casual falling off, or the paleness, or the delicate arcs each side her nose that began to quote Mag's prettiness as something of the past referred to, which prescription or admonition could not reach, as they had done in the twenties; or that the years had anything inexorable to do with the "want of accommodation" that the oculist told her of in her own eyesight, and for which she wore a ladylike pair of glasses over the fine work that had done the mischief "that winter when she embroidered the deep borders for the library portière."

Chat's hair was undeniably gray, in lines, — "so early!" Bab would say. "What do you suppose *makes* people, nowadays?" And she would instance Pauline Talfrey, "snow-*white*, at thirty-three!" In all this there was the sweetest actual unconsciousness. They told their ages to the census man without reserve; nobody else asked. And between times they really forgot. They just went on living; commented on the changes in society and in the town, and compared the things of to-day with those of other days, identifying themselves always with to-day and with the newest change; importing all the fresh ideas to the Bird's

Nest, and really keeping themselves wonderfully fresh by virtue of their simple obduracy of self-location.

They had kept house together since they were indeed young girls; and their early orphanage had contributed to their persistent feeling of being somehow still young things, since one always thinks of orphans so, and the church prayed every Sunday for them as "fatherless children."

They had had small means to manage at first, and had lived on the same old carpets, darned and made over, till Mag said "The venerable Brussels in the best parlor was all twine and tradition"; but investments had been turning out splendidly for them in the palmy years of inflation, and they had remodelled the cottage and replaced its furnishings, till John Pye and *his* Mag would never have known the Nest again, could they have bent their bright wings and alighted suddenly in it.

The low, painted wooden mantel in the sitting-room, where Captain Pye — for he had been a retired ship-master — used to keep his briarwood pipe and Indian tobacco-jar, and where his odd, crumpled slips of memorandum and calculation — oftener than not raggedly torn envelopes, made sacred and *défendus* by half a dozen pencilled figures — used to accumulate under a bronze thermometer-stand until Mrs. Pye would insist on his making a spring-cleaning of his own and beginning again, — was now a tall Eastlake, with plenty of real china ornaments from Canton; a whole company of Russian peasants and pedlers and soldiers, with Emperor Nicholas First on horseback among them, in painted biscuit; recent additions of Japan boxes and caddies and trays; and gay fans, like open-winged butterflies, paired at the corners. Around the room, three feet and a half tall from the baseboard, stood great, meditative, dull-colored herons, on their stilted legs, with their necks and bills looped backward upon humpy shoulders and forward on feathery-fringed breasts, each with one long-clawed foot hidden in water-grasses, and the other set on a broad, floating, weedy leaf. There were pomegranates — scarlet flowers and red-gold fruit among thorny twisted branches — above, and nothing between but a pale-gray, smooth expanse, that might stand for pale-hot, tropical atmosphere; though what the herons had to

do with this, and the pomegranates overhead, might be wondered at. Miss Ammah, when she called, had said that the herons ought to have been flamingoes; but Miss Margaret assured her eagerly that there were no flamingoes at all among the dado patterns. They all came in regular styles, and it was no use to try to carry out a fancy or a suitableness. She had got the pomegranate border because Chat and Bab said the room wanted something livening, with all that brown and gray and dull green.

The library, which they once used and spoke of simply as the front parlor, had low bookshelves instead of the dado, quite in the authorized style; here and there on the top of which were the orthodox little easels, with something in decorative porcelain or cloisonnée or painted tile set on edge upon them, in the prevailing charmingly useless way. Whatever nonsense was anywhere mixed up, however, was redeemed by the great square bay on the southwest side, full of rioting ivies and plumy ferns and bright little blossomy plants in bracket-pots and along the shelves; while a perfect bank of splendid calla plants, their tall stems and shadowy, winglike leaves like ranks of Blake's strange angels, and the white cups that had begun to unroll at Easter not yet all gone from among them, filled up the whole floor-tier.

"Now *that's* a dado worth the while!" had said Miss Ammah. "If you could get a thing painted like that, for a room where the lilies could n't be; or tufts and tangles of high brakes and ferns; or flags, with the brown cat-tails. But those herons and storks and rhinoceroses!"

"*Oh*, how queer you are! Chat and Bab and I always say so! and I tell you they don't come in any such styles. You must take what other people have. And there are *never* rhinoceroses! and we all think the herons are beautiful. So old-fashioned, you know, and in *heraldry!*"

"So are griffins — and goats — and unicorns — and spotted dogs. But not walking around the wainscots."

"That 's what I told you, and I should n't want them if they were." When, of course, Miss Ammah gave it up.

They were all three at home, sitting in the library, when

France Everidge came in; Chat and Bab, as usual, one with her palette and tile, and the other with her macramé cushion; and Mag just returned and seated, with her bonnet-strings loosened, to tell what she had seen, what heard, and what adventured.

"I met Kennison," she told them, "and thought I'd better make sure of him before the hurry came on; so I engaged him to calcomania the spare bedroom."

"Mag!" cried Bab imploringly, "why *can't* you learn the difference? I *hope* you said 'calcimine' to that man. And the other day you told Ellen Johnes that we meant to have a parquetrie floor laid in the little west hall! What will people think? You are growing a perfect Mrs. Malaprop."

"I don't care, *that's* right, for I looked it out afterward. They're both French; one comes from the floor, 'parquet,' and the other from the marking-off, 'marqueter'; so if one is any more real and regular than the other, it's the floor itself, made of real pieces: the other might be painted; and you need n't have put your eyebrows into isosceles triangles at me, nor Ellen Johnes have got 'marquetrie' into her next sentence. I *scorned* to say a word!"

Here France was shown in; but presently Miss Mag went on again, addressing her news primarily, as she would have handed other refreshment, to their visitor.

"And I met Miss Ammah out over the hill, — *walking*, way over to the Johneses. We all think she's so queer, you know, don't we?" turning to Chat and Bab with the last words; and Chat and Bab nodded, over paint-brush and bobbin.

"I asked her why she never came and stayed with us. What *do* you think she said? That we should never get at each other. Four minds all made up, she said, and characters settled. Too much lignum-vitæ. What *do* you suppose she meant? Too much like four nine-pin balls, with nothing to knock down. I'm sure we're *always* knocking down! Never *heard* such a queer person. Said she liked best to go where there were young folks, — characters forming and coming out. She could get and give something. Wanted something '*fluent*.' As if we were n't fluent enough, — Chat and Bab and I!"

"Are the farmer people fluent up at Fellaiden?" put in Miss Bab.

"That 's what I asked her, and she told me, 'Very much so.' O, you can't possibly get anything out of Miss Ammah. *Fluent!*"

"Did you go to Mr. Brett's, Mag?"

"Yes; and they 're coming Thursday. Hope the calcimine man won't come too. But I haven 't got through about Miss Ammah. I asked her if there were any young persons in Fellaiden that she could get and give with. She said, 'Yes, a few; and that there would be one more this summer, for a young person had agreed to go up there with her.' Who on earth do you suppose?"

Miss Mag turned again toward France, but France was not there. During this last speech, she had moved around to the elder sister's side of the library-table, and was watching Miss Bab's quick knotting of the soft gray twine.

"What heaps of things there are to do in the world!" she was saying, before Miss Mag had come to her question. "And they are inventing new ones all the time. It 's very discouraging to a conscientious person!"

"One has to be pretty busy," said Miss Chat, putting a hard, dark, conventional line around the edge of a leaf in two flat shades of color, "to keep up with ideas."

France was afraid to look at the tile, with the ragged branch thrust out from nowhere, in true art style, across one side, and the funereal bird, solid black with shadow, though sitting there in freest, unobstructed atmosphere. It was too funny; and France amiably endeavored to keep the fun internal.

"I wonder," she said, gravely and queerly, "if it 's meet, right, and our bounden duty to try to do it all? Because I 'm all behindhand in negligences and ignorances if it is. And Clarence Cook and the art papers do make you feel as if they were a kind of law and gospel. — Did you hear Mr. Brett last Sunday, Miss Margaret?"

The obvious connecting link was law and gospel, and the quotation from the prayer-book. If there was another connection, France kept it, and whatever earnestness it may have had, inwardly to herself, with her fun.

"Yes. I don't know. I don't remember particularly," said Miss Mag.

France did not preach it over again. She was not given to preaching or to quotation of sacred authority, except aslant, which might be taken, as well as not, for mere odd levity. But she was recalling something about the nearest commandment being the way of escape from the nearest temptation; and about being busy with God's things being a safeguard against getting too busy with the things of the world. Under her nonsense and her oddity, France Everidge was unquestionably beginning to weigh and measure things in some rather perplexing ways.

"You like Mr. Brett?" She put the question suddenly, with the consciousness of not caring to be asked herself about what the sermon had been.

"O yes. He 's a good man and a good neighbor. But for a clergyman, — well, he 's limited."

"I suppose we can't expect to get an *un*limited good man."

"*France!*" with a volume of emphasis and dropping inflection on the vowel sound of the short name. "You 're as queer as Miss Ammah, every bit." And Miss Ammah got one of the explosive falls upon the first "A" in her name. "Queerest girl I ever saw in my life! Wonder what you 'll be at her age, if your character keeps coming out!"

France laughed as she got up to go. This was not the way she had meant to put it in circulation, but she put it now, upon the impulse, as it came.

"Can't tell about anything so far off," she said; "but I 'm as likely as not to get farther on at present in the same way, since I 'm the young person that is going with her up to Fellaiden."

She spoke slowly, and she had got to the door while speaking; she held the knob in her hand, and only paused to say good-by. Miss Mag was on her feet with surprise, making her way toward her, as if she would have had her back, and all the whys and hows out of her.

"My! What for? Do tell us!" was all she could possibly say, falling into the proverbial commonplaces, as they first fell into speech.

"To run away from my neglected duties among the savages who have n't got any. Good-by!" and France was off.

She walked slowly through the village, on the other side of which from the Pyes' Nest the Everidges lived. She met Mr. Brett walking down, and stopped to shake hands with him.

"Have you been as far as our house?" he asked kindly.

"Not to-day. I have only been to the Pyes' Nest."

"One of the pleasantest places to go to. How pretty they make it!" said the minister.

France looked curiously, more than she was aware, into his eyes. Undoubtedly the minister was limited. He had preached a sermon last Sunday, grand with simple truth for simple living; believing it and living it himself from his heart. How could he know, though, that within five minutes this girl had been comparing that teaching with Miss Chat's painting of absurdities on china, and Miss Bab's tying twine into knots and chains for table-fringe? How could he see that the curious look in her eyes was searching for something that would tell her how much of life was meant for porcelain and macramé lace?

The Miss Pyes were among his friendliest parishioners; he never judged personal judgments; he had had pleasant hours — and was freshly bidden to more — at the cottage, which, perhaps, he had a little scruple about smiling at under its popular name of the Pyes' Nest, and praised the more unreservedly in consequence, when France called it so.

"I suppose they do make it all the pleasanter for the Bretts, and for other people; even the fun of it. I suppose there 's some sort of a mission about it," said France to herself, walking up the hill.

CHAPTER III.

FARMYARD AND KITCHEN.

Farmer Heybrook's old brown mare came lungeing up the steep hill, pitch after pitch, from the deep hollow like a crater, in which, viewed from above, everything, going or coming, seemed to drop over and disappear, and thence to emerge at either side in almost perpendicular struggle, like a creature slipped into a pit-trap, and scrambling desperately for dear life, almost against possibility or expectation, out of it.

Israel, the farmer's son, was driving. You could see — that is, if you had been by Mother Heybrook's side, you could have seen, from the low-roofed, wide piazza that embraced the southwest angle of the house, and from which rolled away, beneath, the hill-country landscape of three counties — his fresh straw hat showing bright in the sunlight against the rock-shadows, or between the young green boughs of the maples, as old Saltpetre tugged up to the top of one waterbar after another, and on each paused, with heaving sides, while the hat measured both halt and progress by its own stop, higher up to view, against point after point of the distance.

Mother Heybrook watched eagerly till something more was visible, not quite so tall as the straw hat that shone bright in the sun. Arrived at a clearer opening and a more topping pitch, a red rose and a fluttering ribbon, shoulder-high to the hat, made themselves manifest.

"She 's come! Sarell 's come! and I 'm whole-footed for *this* summer!" said "Ma'am" joyfully to the farmer, sitting in his shirt-sleeves on the red settee-rocker.

"Expected her, did n't ye?" asked the farmer calmly.

"Well, yes; but you can't tell how things 'll turn out, 'specially at Uncle Amb's. I have n't ever felt so sure of her, come

spring, since she took up there for the winter. 'Tain't easy to get much of *anything* back from Uncle Amb's, you know."

"I know; ye need n't remind me," said Farmer Heybrook. And he got up from the red rocker and went round to the front of the house, to meet Rael and take the mare off his hands. Rael was wanted to go after some stray cattle. Mrs. Heybrook came through the house to the front door.

"I 'm right down glad to see you, Sarell," said the mistress, as the girl jumped, with clean aplomb, from the wagon-wheel to the broad doorstone.

"And I 'm *up* and down glad to get here," answered the maid, with equal cordiality; and the two women, hirer and hired, kissed each other, as friends between whom there was no difference.

"Was n't any diffikilty about getting away?" asked Mrs. Heybrook, in Yankee form and abbreviation.

"Alwers diffikilty," replied Miss Sarell Gately; "nothing 's ever quite ready to come to the p'int up there. Mother Pemble 's awful kicksy-wicksy, and Elviry did n't scursely know how to spare me. Land! I *do* hope *I* sha'n't ever live to be an old rag-baby! Never mind my box, Rael. I 'll take it up myself."

The girl, fresh and lively, and very far from any likelihood of ever being an old rag-baby, perceptibly delighted in her freshness, and to show it, contrastingly to her words, before the face of the young man. The red rose in her hat-front marked, with flashing movements, her gay briskness of spirits, as she "took the stage," and felt herself the central interest in this moment of her arrival and welcome.

"Did you get any mail, Israel?"

"I 'd almost forgot," answered the young man, speaking for the first time, and putting his hand in the deep pocket of his loose summer coat, just as he had been turning away; "there 's a letter from Miss Tredgold, and something, I guess, from Hawksbury way. Old Puttenham is always prompt."

"And so 's Miss Tredgold," said his mother cheerily. "One 's a good set-off to the other, Rael."

Rael looked at her as if he thought the set-off, to most of the

hindrances and hard rubs, was only secondarily through Miss Tredgold or anybody else. All he said was, seeing that Sarell had gone through to the kitchen for a look at old familiar corners, — "I 'm glad you 've got your help, mother. Now be sure you let Sarell *do* things. I 'll be back in an hour or so. Don't hinder supper, I shall only want some bread and milk," and in a moment more he was over the Great-Mowing wall, and going by the field-edge inside it, down under the brow of the beautiful land swell, toward the oak pastures beyond.

Mrs. Heybrook took her letters into the sitting-room, and put on her spectacles, that lay on the top of her big work-basket. Sarell's voice sounded already beyond, in a full, joyous rendering of "Hold the Fort," and between the notes was audible the energetic clatter of dishes with which she was setting the family table in the cool out-room. She was taking her place and her work without preliminary, proud, with a pleasant ostentation, of her full familiarity with ways and things.

"Hold the Fort," sung through, gave place to "Only an Armor-bearer," and the rafters rang, and the wide, open old farmhouse was full, all through, of the untutored music. Mrs. Heybrook's exclamation of astonishment over the letter from Boston was lost in the tide of song, and the good lady hushed herself up, with a second thought, and did not repeat, or follow it with any announcement. "Time enough to-morrow," she said to herself. "I don't believe Sarell 'll more than half like it; and she 's so high-spirited to-night!" and she put the folded sheet into the envelope again, and that into her pocket, as she rose to set the Hawksbury letter, with her husband's name upon the cover, behind the brass candlestick on the high mantel.

Then she called Sarell, and led her through the house; showed her the new frilled curtains in the best parlor, and the braided hall-mats she had made in the winter; the new spreads, that she had "pieced," in the bedrooms, and the pink puff in Miss Tredgold's room.

"Don't seem as if you had left anything for me," said Sarell.

"O, this is all lezhure work. Now we 've got to take hold together, in earnest, and make things go."

They went through kitchen, out-room, and butteries together; then out to the front porch and across to the barn; Mrs. Heybrook showing Sarell how the "menfolks" had made everything neat as to their part, at odd jobs after the noon "baitings," and after sundowns, when the cows were milked and the chickens were in, and the pigs had got their supper, and the turkeys had been fed in the back dooryard, as had to be done to "wont" them to coming home nights.

The wide grass dooryard had been raked and cleaned of wind-blown branches; the wagons were tidily stowed in the sheds, leaving free the floor of the south barn, where Miss Tredgold liked to sit on a toss of hay, and enjoy the sweet air, and the picture of the hills framed in by the doors that opened out upon the great mowing; and the little corner stairway was swept down that led to the lofts, where also she liked to make a still, luxurious retreat among the huge, fragrant cushions of the mow.

"We 've got the dooryard to sweep over, ourselves," said Mrs. Heybrook, coming back with her companion toward the front porch. "I never call it done till that 's done; then it 's as fine as a carpet. We 'll take to it as we get chances; it 's all that 's left to do, and they — Miss Tredgold won't be here for a day or two yet. Thursday noon, probably, the letter says."

Between the "they" that had slipped unaware from her lips and the finishing of her communication, Mrs. Heybrook had made a diversion of stepping aside to pick up a few gray turkey-feathers newly scattered on the clean sward. She might have been going to say anything with her "they," and Sarell did not connect it with the announcement concerning Miss Tredgold.

"Why not take right hold of it now?" said the capable damsel. "There 's near an hour of daylight yet. I 'll fetch the brooms. I know where you keep 'em." And Sarell was off, across the end stoop into the out-room, and back presently, with her dress pinned up high behind, and two good corn-brooms in her hands.

So, while the distant mountain-tops turned all delicious rose-

color, and then royal with purple mist, and then dusk with darkening gray, and the turkeys, roosting in long rows, shoved and fluttered in the elm-boughs, the farm wife and the farm maiden brushed over the young, close-growing turf, till no beautiful lawn, cropped every day by a mower, could be fresher or daintier under foot, or half so much a piece of the real, generous, green world, as it spread out there in soft color and speckless distance over nearer and farther slopes, and all looked as if thrown open together, inviting the footsteps, — one free, clean-swept, beautiful carpet, flung in grand mile-breadths across intervales and over the heaving hills.

The menfolks came in to the delayed supper; and Sarell, her skirt shaken down again, and all rosy herself with exercise and gladness, waited on them with the milk-bowls and the great plates of bread, and pie-pieces and doughnuts, and the sage cheese, fresh cut from a huge creamy round; and she was so gay that Mrs. Heybrook felt half mean at not telling her right off to-night, and wholly sure that it would be a shame to tell her anything that might throw a doubt or a disappointment over the summer-time that was so cheerily and heartily beginning.

For in her own heart it was a least bit of vexation to the good woman herself that a new, strange city boarder — a young-lady boarder — was to be added to the summer family; and she was in no haste to say to anybody what Miss Tredgold said in the letter that was in her pocket, of the young friend, whom she only put into a postscript, and proposed to put into the northwest bedroom, that opened, slightly partitioned, from her own, and was never otherwise used when she was at the farm.

She felt a little consciousness of being "worked" in secret, — Mrs. Heybrook did, — and that this had added somewhat to the effervescence of her energy as she swept the dooryard so vigorously with Sarell, astonishing the boys, when they came up across the lot, with their smart beginning. Sarell, for her part, evidently enjoyed making nothing, before them, of this first taking up of her share of the labors that lay at her hand.

"Don't you ever think your day's work done, mother?" Rael had asked. He was always taking "mother's" part against herself.

And Lyman had said, as he shambled in his overgrown boy's fashion, with long, strong limbs, across the yard-place past the women, "They're a team, those two, mother and Sarell! We're hitched up now for all summer; and there'll be no grass growin' under *their* heels!"

Not elegant commendation; but Sarell was glad and proud of it, although it was only Lyme that said it.

Mrs. Heybrook was thinking and wondering, then and through supper-time, how her boys, — bright fellows and academy-bred, and far enough from the traditional clodhopperism which real New England farm-life has long been rising away from, although Lyman did shamble with his long legs and say things more hill-flavored than society-toned, — how her boys would come and go in their shirt-sleeves, in the sweat of their manly labor, with brown faces and earth-stained hands, all summer through, before the dainty city girl, sitting in her muslin frocks to watch them, as she watched the cows coming home or lumbering off to pasture, or the awkward turkeys fluttering and shuffling into the great elm-boughs to roost. She did not know what a bucolic was, but she did not want her sons to act one three months long, for the entertainment or the passive observation of a woman of their own age, so brought up, probably, as to look on farmers and their bullocks as of one herd and nature. Yet she hoped the boys would come in at the front door if they wanted to. She would not have them take one roundabout turn to or from their work, or even put their coats on when they toiled up the steep west side-hill from the mowing, in full sight from the cool piazza all the way.

Moreover, she was exercised and "put about" in advance concerning her pantry, now that she knew the young lady was on the way. Would the veal roast suit her for a dinner, or ought there to be a fowl beside? The white rooster came into her head, that night, after she had laid it on her pillow, and she waked Welcome to tell him that they must be sure to

"ketch and kill it some time next day." Welcome's grunt, as he turned over, had conveyed more complex meaning than mere assent. They had tried to catch and kill that white rooster before; and next morning they were to begin hoeing the big south cornfield, half a mile down toward the river.

Of Sarell, who meanwhile was sleeping deliciously on her springy bed of fresh, rustling corn-husks, in the little kitchen attic, with the end gable-window looking right out into a cloud of apple-blossoms between which twinkled the far, golden stars, and by whose low sill she had sat for half an hour before undressing, thinking how good it was to get back to Heybrook Farm for all summer, it may as well be said that, so far at any rate, there was nothing in her pleasure, or in what Mother Heybrook instinctively felt would be a damper upon it, that has to do with the ordinary mechanism of a novel, or the reader's inevitable forecast of how things, according to all precedent, are going to befall.

Sarell was not a bit in love with handsome Rael: she had good common-sense enough to know that it would be a hazardous investment of sentiment; for Rael Heybrook was "'cademy learned," and on the way, through all his rough country toil, to be in a profession some day, and a gentleman; and though Sarell was indeed of too pure republican Yankee strain to allow that she wasn't "good enough," in a certain sense, for anybody or anywhere, she could feel that she had scarcely that *rapport* with Rael, or that relation to the Heybrook views in general, to make it a prudent thing for her to set her mind — or her hat with its "rose enthroned" — deliberately in that direction. None the less did she enjoy, in the frank, pleasant, hearty life of the farmhouse, being the one young woman in it; having for a brief season the representation, in her own person, of all that was freshly feminine, bright, smart, housewifely, capable, and important there. A woman always likes to show a man what may be for somebody, though she have neither wish nor hope that it may be for him. She enjoyed the importance of her arrival; the complete at-homeness which she reassumed at once, as we have seen, in the well-ordered, well-to-do establishment. She had a pretty part to play, all

summer long, in her blithe, buxom way, among them. And she undoubtedly would have liked it as it had been before, to herself; unshorn of precedence by any other and different young ladyhood, unimpaired by comparison with another and very different style. She was, undoubtedly, pleased with the sense of being free herself, and in companionship with a bright young person of the other sex, whom she liked genially and healthily, and who was free also. Some day, perhaps, when — who knows? — she might have made up her mind to certain other contingencies which had begun to loom already elsewhere, she might hear with calmness that Israel Heybrook had found and chosen, when she was not at hand, some nice girl for a wife; but she would have no pleasure in standing by at the choosing. Not, either, that all this ultimation would be in her mind as anywise probable from the advent of a young-lady city boarder at the farm. It would only be some stranger in the "first young-lady part" and place; and she had not "taken the stage" to give way in the second scene to that.

So wise Mrs. Heybrook let her have her welcome and her little flourish all to herself, and go off to bed to-night, unconscious. It would be better to-morrow, perhaps, that she had so installed her, and could then bring forward, as a secondary point, the fact reserved.

The first practical thing, next morning, and that which would bring out incidentally, perhaps, the announcement to Sarell, was the catching of the white rooster. Mrs. Heybrook, after Sarell had gone up-stairs last night, had told Rael — standing with him in the cool back porch a minute, as the mother loved to do with her boy when the last work was over — the import of Miss Tredgold's letter. The old farmer heard it in the brief, safe interval between the dropping of his head upon the pillow and the dropping of himself into dreams. No chance, then, for any more lengthened objection than a grunt; and afterward, if he wanted to object, which Welcome Heybrook never did want to do if he could help it, he would have to begin the subject again on purpose himself.

All Israel said to the news was, "Well, it's your business, mother. If it's satisfactory to you, nothing else matters."

But her feminine clairvoyance detected the undertone of restraint, and she remembered again the field labors and the hot days, the dust and the sweat of the brows, the shirt-sleeves and the coarse trousers, and the coming up the hill at the nooning. I doubt if Israel thought of one of these things.

While, in the early morning, "mother" was putting up the dinner-pails that were to be taken to the far field-work that day, the farmer was fain to submit to the housewifely edict, and make one more raid after that veritable outlaw and guerilla, the white rooster.

Israel, the tall, blond-haired, sober-faced fellow, wearing his old sun-scorched straw hat in his princely way over the tossed locks, deferred also to his mother's will, and strode gravely around the yard-place, heading the bird which his father, with stoop and "shoo" and arms outspread, drove fluttering from one side to the other. Lyman, the boy of eighteen, tickled with the fun and the mischief, laughed and shouted and slyly bore the hunt over toward the barn. Mrs. Heybrook stood before the porch, and called nervously, —

"He 'll be over the wall into the gardin' ! Look out, Rael ! He 'll get under the barn. Don't you dare to let him, Lyman Heybrook ! Father ! keep this way more, and Rael 'll have him ! "

Father kept this way, Lyman made a rush, the white rooster flew screaming over Israel's shoulder, and the next minute, scrambling to ground in a cloud of dust and feathers, scuttled tumultuously under the sill of the barn and disappeared.

"Well, you *are* smart menfolks, — three of you ! " ejaculated Mother Heybrook, laughing too, with all her might, as she was apt to do if ever she tried to scold. "You 've done it now. You won't get him this time, and you may as well clear off to your hoeing. Lyman, let alone poking ! you need n't pertend ; he 's just where you meant he should be."

But Lyman went into the barn, and took down his gun. He was n't going to lose the excuse for a shot.

"That 's what you wanted, is it ? Why could n't you shoot him flying, then ? O you goose ! Stop ! how 'll you get him out again when he *is* shot ? "

The gun went off at the same moment that Israel, at her elbow, said quietly, "He don't mean to kill him, mother. He 'll only scare him out the other side."

But nothing came out the other side. The rooster was either dead or "pertending." Now they had lost a good half hour, Mother Heybrook said, "Well, it don't signify so terrible much, to-day. But you *must* get him to-night or to-morrow. She 'll have to make out with the veal, first time."

"She? which?" asked Israel, stopping with his hoe over his shoulder. Somehow, the two words, with the interrogation after each, carried whole volumes of exception to his mother's unaccustomed worry and the evident exciting cause.

"Why, the young one, of course. I know what 'll satisfy Miss Tredgold."

"Don't let that young woman give you double work or double thinking, all summer, mother," Israel said, with kind authority, looking straight into her eyes.

Women like to be commanded for kindness' sake, and especially does a mother, by her grown-up son. "He 's a good boy," Mrs. Heybrook spoke aloud, to herself, as she turned in at the porchway, "if he *did n't* ketch the rooster. And he would if it had n't been for that Lyme, too." The twinkle in her eye told that she was proud of "that Lyme" and of his pranks, also.

Sarell was washing dishes at the kitchen sink. The window over it looked straight forth, through twists of grapevines, upon the scene of action. It was a marvellous lightener, in double sense, that summer window, to the homely toil. Sarell was *au courant*, and as good as participant, in all the comings and goings and small excitements of the house-yard. She clattered her dishes like cymbals of triumph, by no means loth or failing so to sound forth her achieving smartness; and her laugh rang out high and hearty at the white rooster's clumsy but successful tactics, and the menfolks' discomfiture.

"See," Mrs. Heybrook said, meditatively, coming in, "to-day 's Wednesday. That cretur ought to be kep' over a day, certain, or he 'll be as tough as Gibraltar. I 'd have had a chicken-pie of him to-morrow, if they 'd only made out to get

him. But we 'll boil him, with a nice dish of greens, Friday. Miss Tredgold 's great for early greens, and the young one 'll like my butter-cream sauce, I 'll engage. Well, they must n't chase him under the barn again, that 's all; and, too, the underpinnin' of that barn ought to be seen to; the hens steal their nests there, and everything. It 's a regular trap."

"*I* could 'a got that rooster, Mis' Heybrook," said capable Sarell. "And I 'll have him yet, before them three is back again, if you won't let on. But who 's the young one ?"

"I did n't know there was any, myself, till last night; and I thought I would n't say anything just then," answered Mrs. Heybrook, breaking it gently, even now. "She 's coming up with Miss Tredgold, and she 'll have the little northwest bedroom. I donno 's she 'll make much differ'nce, but 't was n't what I was thinking of. Perhaps that 's just as well, though; for I might n't have thought favorable, and I should n't like to refuse Miss Tredgold, neither."

"O, well," answered Sarell encouragingly, "perhaps she 's old enough not to be under foot everywhere; and I presume she 's been learnt how to behave."

"Land's sake, Sarell! she 's a young lady! Under foot! She 's more likely to be way up overhead — of all our ways. That 's what I 'm most afraid of. These young folks have n't got the consideration of women like Miss Tredgold."

Mother Heybrook had done it now. She had chased *her* rooster under the barn. So, like Lyme, she made haste to fire a shot after him. "But there! what 's the use of borrowin' trouble ? An' I don't. It don't amount to anything, any way; and Miss Tredgold *is* considerate, and she knows what she 's about. She would n't bring anybody that would be highflown or diffikilt."

If the newcomer should be "highflown or diffikilt" enough to keep quite out of Sarell's own sphere and ways, — that is, out of the sphere and ways of the whole Heybrook household, — probably the country maiden might not care, or be disturbed. The slight shade that crossed her cheerful face at the hearing was not the forecast of something that was to be quite high and distant, but rather of something that might come down near

enough to get between her and her sunlight. But Sarell was not of the sort that borrows trouble, either; and she scorned to show a jealousy or disturbance.

"I presume she 's learnt how to behave," she reiterated, changing only from the passive to the active form of the verb. The phrase, she thought, applied otherwise as well to nineteen as to nine.

Mrs. Heybrook laughed. "It's hard getting round you, Sarell," she said. "Now if you can only get round that white rooster."

And the two women went out for a reconnoissance, and to construct a plan of campaign. It was a good diversion from the summer-boarder subject. Sarell was queen in the farmyard, and in the kitchen among the household regalia; her mopstick was sceptre, her fresh working apron, with bib and strap, was ribbon and order: none could divest or depose her. Innermost is highest; behind the scenes is place and privilege; every shop-girl knows that, dealing sublimely across her counter with the *canaille* of purchasers. No mere "boarder" could interfere with Sarell in her established centrality, or get the better of her from the outside line. She felt it, and reassured herself, going forth with high intent to get the better of the menfolks.

The menfolks — the "three of 'em," as they were always numerically reproached when a chore waited or a horse or fowl evaded — came back to the hunt at night, having already kept a searching lookout through the day-intervals, at the nooning, and in errands to the house or barns. But no rooster was forthcoming, even to roost.

Rael wondered, and peered into corn-barn and mangers and shed-corners, as he went about, in his usual sedate way, with the feeding of the creatures and the letting in and milking of the cows that stood at the head of the lane, looking over wall and barplace into their yard. Lyme ransacked loft and granary, and shied stones into the darkness under the big barn. The old farmer kept up a general survey of earth and air, wandering around the premises on the "expectant system," ready to pounce upon the first symptom of emergence anywhere, but lost in the wide maze of possibilities in which the "clear tor-

ment" had taken refuge. At least five times he had looked hopelessly into the kitchen, to tell "ma'am" and Sarell that it was "onaccountable, and kept gittin' more so."

"Of course he 's *somewhere*," said Sarell, with merciless encouragement.

"It's most too bad," mother would whisper; especially relentful when Rael came in with the milk, and said it was too bad for *her* to be disappointed, but it seemed as if the old fellow either really had been shot, or had got clear away off the farm altogether. But still she did not "let on" or let up.

"Of *course* he 's shot," said Lyme, reporting in his turn. "That little rifle of mine knows its way like a fetcher dog."

"Then how do you expect to get him?" asked his mother, hardened again by the boy's conceit.

It lasted till dark, and it began again in the morning. It was an exciting interest now: the true spirit of the chase was up; and "menfolks" will spend a whole day in chasing a rat, if once that aboriginal instinct takes possession.

Lyme was up at daylight, rushing and diving about like a baffled hound; the others came later and quieter, but were at it for a good half hour before they called Lyman off,— as if he alone represented the boy element among them,— and all went afield for their "sunrise spell."

At breakfast the women were ominously silent, as if the fun were pretty well over for them, and the difficulties of the larder remained solemnly to be met. The "three of 'em" went off, puzzled, reluctant, half exasperated and half sheepish at their failure.

Then Sarell and the mother had their laugh out; and the mother laughed till she cried, which was not all from the laughing either. Those three great farmer fellows had been so persevering and so patient, after all! But Sarell was only one-and-twenty. She had not begun yet to have too much compassion on the menfolks.

It seemed to me to be well that you should have this introductory glimpse of the Heybrooks by themselves, before the summer boarders came, and the little piece of the history of France, that I have taken in hand to write about, began.

CHAPTER IV.

POLITE TO A BUTTERFLY.

It was chill among the mountains the next morning after Miss Ammah and France had come. There was a great fog slowly rolling down between the hills from north to south, hanging above the distant river course. That was a sign of bright weather presently. When the fog rolled up, rain came.

Miss Ammah went out into the kitchen after breakfast, to warm her slippered feet at Mrs. Heybrook's shining stove. France stood in the doorway, not yet quite free of the *penetralia*, like Miss Ammah. Something of a savory smell was boiling and steaming deliciously over the fire. Israel Heybrook was just beyond in the stoop, whence a low window opened over the kitchen dresser, putting some small repair to a farm tool. Mrs. Heybrook called to him.

"How is it about that rooster, Rael?"

"Well, mother, it's a kind of ridiculous thing, but I guess we'll have to give him up. Unless Lyme hit him and he's dead under the barn, there don't seem to be any track of him."

"You're sure you looked everywhere last night?"

"Yes, ma'am, everywhere that was probable."

"And this morning?"

"This morning Lyme has been hunting everywhere that was improbable. Father says we must take up some boards of the barn floor. It won't do to leave him there."

Rael was standing with his back half turned against the window. He could not see the energetic winks his mother gave Miss Tredgold, nor that lady's vain efforts to look grave and unconcerned.

"Do you think you would know him if you *saw* him, Rael?"

"What do you mean, mother? What's up?"

"Look here."

Rael leaned in at the window and looked. Mrs. Heybrook lifted the cover of the big pot, and thrust her meat-fork in.

"Is *that* anything like him?" and she held up, dripping and steaming, the clean-dressed, half-cooked body of a fowl, wings and legs neatly skewered and tied down. "He won't fly off over your shoulder *this* time, Rael."

"Did he fly in there?" asked cool Rael.

"No, *sir!* It took the women,— Sarell and I. *We* drove him *into* the barn."

Lyman came in through the shed, looking for the tool. "Not done yet, Rael?" he began, in a wondering way. "What 'r ye after?" Then he caught his mother's words across his own, glanced in over Israel's shoulder, and took in the situation. "Wahl," he articulated, affecting his slowest Yankee drawl, that he knew perfectly well to do without, "we air done then, — rooster 'n all. When did it take place, Mis' Heybrook?"

"Yesterday mornin', jest after the doctor give him up and went away."

Lyman was a natural practitioner for any ailing live-stock on the farm, and had a strong idea of a medical profession, so he was already brevetted "doctor" in home speech.

"And we hunting him all noontime an' after sundown, as long as we could n't see! I guess I 'd as good go stop father tearing up the whole barn floor. Mis' Heybrook, you 're a masterpiece!"

"That 's the way my boys take a joke," said Mrs. Heybrook proudly, as the two marched off.

Some suggestions like these rose unexpressed through France Everidge's mind, as she looked on, diverted, at the little scene: —

"Not elegant banter; a homely joke enough; but how bright and good-natured they are! I wonder if the main thing in it is n't as good *human* as the politest clever chaff? And how handsome that grave, proud Israel is!"

On his part, Israel never once looked at the doorway opposite his window, where the girl's figure stood against the farther light, complete in prettiness, from the high-puffed hair to the

fluted ruffle of the morning-dress under which the shoe-tips hid and peeped. Perhaps there was just a suffix to France's thought as she walked away in her own direction: "Nice-mannered to his mother. I wonder he has n't a little more manner, or notice, or something, for other people!"

That night, just after sundown, she looked from her north-west window at the red-gold of the sky, through the maple leaves. The great boughs reached across to the lintel, over the wide, low piazza-roof. An idea came to her mind. In a minute she and a big, puffy chair-cushion were out upon the shingles. She put the cushion down at the very eaves, where, seating herself, she could almost lean against the huge round trunk that reared up straight beside her. "I 'll sit here every day," she said in her mind, gazing delightedly through the wonderful fret of the leafy lattice to the golden, gleaming distance, as into the very chamber of the sun. Everything else was framed out; this only, in.

But sound was not framed out. Rael and his mother came into the piazza beneath. The milking and the milk-straining were over, and their day's work was done. Lyman and Miss Ammah had driven to the village for the mail.

"It ain't a going to cross you, is it, Rael, having this young lady here?"

"Me? No, indeed. What is it to me? It crosses me if *you 're* to be put about. I don't want to see you waiting and fetching for a girl."

"Is *that* it?" and Mrs. Heybrook's tone lifted so that you could hear in it how her face lifted. "I thought you seemed shy of her,— as if it was going to be kind of awkward for you, maybe." Mrs. Heybrook slurred the second "w" slightly in the "awkward"; but we won't be particular about that.

Israel laughed out. "Awkward for me, mother? I don't mind her any more than I would a butterfly on a mullein-stalk!"

Mrs. Heybrook laughed too. "Then we won't go on worrying about each other," she said. "It 's no put-about to me, and you need n't think it. I like to see something young round; a girl, you know." And a sigh came gently with the laugh, for

there had been only one sister for her boys, and she had died a baby.

"I think you might be a little polite to her, Rael. She may get homesick. And I *don't* think she's stuck up, — not a mite."

"Have n't I been polite? Well, there has n't been much time yet, has there?"

How thankful France was to hear Miss Ammah alighting from the chaise upon the far end of the piazza! She had not dared to move, to walk over those crisp-sounding shingles to her window again. She was tingling with anger against herself for her literal, involuntary eavesdropping. In the bustle of Miss Ammah's walking up underneath, and their mingled voices, she crept back into her room.

But would she "sit there every day"? And should Mr. Israel Heybrook be "polite" to her? She thought an emphatic negative to both questions.

She busied herself about her room, finishing some of her unpacking which she had intended to leave till the morning. She chose to be busy when Miss Ammah came up to put away some heavy wrap and take a light shawl from her closet.

Miss Ammah said the sunset was lovely among the hills, from the piazza; but France had been enjoying it, and had these things to make tidy now, and thought she should go to bed early to-night, and watch the sunset from the roof-window. Then a little compunction seized her at leaving her elderly friend so, this first established evening, and she added, with a very sweet quickness, — "if you don't mind, dear Miss Ammah?"

"Why should I, child? We can't get far out of each other's company up here, any more than in a ship at sea. And there's Mother Heybrook expecting her good long talk, to-night. Settle yourself, and go to sleep as the light goes. I often watch it out so, over the hills, and the very next wink I 'm conscious of, it 's streaking in again from the east room, across the hall."

On Saturday, they went over the oak pasture into the upland woodlot, taking their luncheon with them; and in the sweet-breathing solitude, among the ferns and the great tree-shadows,

France forgot what sort of link there was for her between this and any world of people. It was just enough for her that this one day had been made, — right here, and in such fashion, — and that she was living it. It might have been one of the first days, when there was only the evening and the morning, and the word of the Lord in them; and the human story in the earth, with the daily complication and the news of it, had not begun to be.

It was not till the next morning — Sunday — that there came occasion for any real contact of her living with that of the farm people; any question of where her place should be, and how she should take it.

She was dressed for church, whither she had assented to going, of course, and had not asked how, with Miss Ammah; and she was sitting ready, in a fresh, pretty, summer costume, by Miss Ammah's window, while that lady tied her bonnet and put on her black lace shawl.

Two vehicles came down from the barn to the dooryard, over the grass sward that crept close to the threshold.

"Country residences" set the country off at arm's length, with their gravelled drives and turnways, and their stately *porte-cochères.* Farmhouses sit right down in the midst of beauty, and let it cling close and sweet. They displace nothing that a house can help displacing.

France was delighted at the noiseless wheeling up over this soft outside carpet. It was so Sunday-like and still; to-day, especially, with all the rest of the blessed silences.

One carriage was an ancient, rusty, one-seated, farmer's open wagon, to which old Saltpetre was harnessed. When they went down stairs at Mother Heybrook's summons, it appeared that the good lady herself was to drive this, Miss Tredgold accompanying. The other was a sufficiently plain, but modern buggy, open also, drawn by the "colt," who was twelve years old, Saltpetre being eighteen. France found that she was to be taken on this, with Israel for her driver. Of course she made sign neither of notice or objection. It was her first opportunity for letting, or not letting, Mr. Israel Heybrook be "polite."

Israel kept her dress from the wheel as he handed her in,

and spread a checked duster across her lap when she was seated, as quietly and nicely as any young Bostonian of the third hill could have done; then he silently took his place by her side.

France took the thing as a matter of course; said "Thank you," as a matter of course; and for five minutes after, as they slowly climbed one steep ridge after another of the long ascending road said nothing, also as a matter of course.

Israel could keep his peace without feeling it in his feet or his elbows. He held the reins without a fidget, his broad, handsome, sunburnt hand resting, gloveless, upon his knee. France, after they had attained the third ridgepole, felt the stiffness, and that it was her place to break it.

"How far is it to the Centre?" she inquired.

"A long mile," Israel answered.

Then they rode on and said nothing for three ridgepoles more.

"Don't your horses ever refuse these tremendous pitches?" France asked now.

"It would be something like refusing their existence," he replied; and a quiet smile just showed the edges of some splendid teeth. "They don't know anything *but* hills. Are you afraid?"

This was a long speech, longer than she had asked for. She was certainly letting him get too polite. She simply said "No," and it ended again.

I suppose she would not have spoken further until she said "Thank you" at the church door as he handed her out, except that she forgot for the instant he was there to speak to when, at the topmost brow of all, they turned and bore around upon a long crest line, whence the road wound downward presently toward the depth of a glorious basin, whose green slopes rose from its vast round on every side in beautiful, gradual swells of farm, fields, and woodland, and she caught the sudden sight of all this, and of the little centre village, with its white spire lifting into the sun.

"Oh!" she cried, with a lingering exclamation, and half rising to her feet. "It is like Jerusalem!"

"I 've thought of that," said Israel. "Have you been to Jerusalem?"

He asked it as innocently as might be ; he did not suppose that anything was far or difficult or unlikely to these rich city people, who spent all their summers in travelling one whither or another.

She was a little provoked, as if she thought he might be laughing at her.

"No," she said shortly, "I've never flitted that far." And she settled slightly farther toward the corner in her seat. She remembered, as indeed she had not been able to forget, the "butterfly." But Israel did not remember it at all, and she would not have dared to make her words really reminding. The little spitefulness was all for her own indulgence.

"Our minister has been through all the Bible countries," Israel volunteered, really trying, perhaps, to be pleasant and polite to this stranger in his own hill-country. "We have got a pretty unusual man for a country church. He came here for his health, partly."

France said nothing to this, and the talk quite dropped.

At the meeting-house steps, France might or might not have been conscious of the little rustic gathering and its glances of curiosity, — rustic gatherings do not stare open-mouthed in these days, — as the handsomest young farmer and "likeliest" man of all the region round about composedly helped her, the pretty, stylish young city stranger, down over the wagon-wheel.

She accepted his assistance with corresponding unconscious coolness, and walked quietly in after Mother Heybrook and Miss Ammah, who had alighted just before her, while the old farmer and Rael led the horses to the sheds.

When these two came in, in their turn, to the family pew, France, having taken her seat below the two elder ladies, found Rael next her again, which also she took with absolute unnoticing ; as much so as the fact of his mother being at her left.

It fell to her to share a hymn-book with him, standing up during the singing. Now no Fellaiden girl would have done that without a pink flush or an odylic thrill in the fingers that held her side of the cover. France Everidge's utterly quiet face and serene eyes looked forward with the simplest listening in

them ; and the close of her glove-tips upon the book-corner neither hesitated or shifted, except as she raised her thumb and let it fall again when Israel turned the leaf. There were eyes in the pews behind them that were watching all this, and saw nothing but the bearing of a lady, — something a shade finer in its repose, perhaps, than ordinarily perfected itself in Fellaiden, but which had nothing whatever to do, apparently, with any girl-consciousness, either pleased or displeased. Still less did it betray to the Heybrooks themselves that which was nevertheless the consciousness of the unconsciousness, the determination in it, — a little hurt and proud, — to be neither " stuck up " nor accessible, but just no more to him or his politeness than he had said ; alighted near him, but of her own errand and happening merely, as it might be with the butterfly.

The minister was " unusual." His sermon to-day was upon Paul, the Hebrew of the Hebrews. It fitted on curiously to the suggestion that had come to France and Israel by the way.

It spoke of how " Hebrew " meant " from beyond the Euphrates ; " from beyond the separating river that runs between the country of the men that know not God and the country of God's children ; of the divine idea — the Abraham — that first comes over, promised and seeking ; of all the typical history ; of the abiding in " the land " ; the straying into Egypt ; the leading back through the desert ; the conquering and the sinning ; the defeat and the going away into captivity, yes, even to the very borders again of the great river, into the edges of the old idolatry. Of Mankind the Hebrew, made for coming over from ignorance into light, crossing continually some new Euphrates ; of the " Hebrews of the Hebrews," taught deeper and deeper, from beyond and still from that beyond to another, passover after passover. Of how God calls, how He chooses ; a nation from nations, a man from men ; yes, ourselves from ourselves, until he makes up, first in every one, and at last of all in one grand body, his new Jerusalem, that descendeth from Him out of heaven. And how that is the restoration, the coming back of the Jews, and the eternal rebuilding, and the tabernacle of God with men. But how, before that can be, there shall be the loosing of the avenging angels of the revelation, " bound " in

that "great river, the river Euphrates," — in all that separates and hinders from the coming into the kingdom, — to slay, and slay, and slay, with fire, and with smoke, and with brimstone.

When France and Israel reached the crest-curve of the great hill again on their way home, but not before, France spoke. "I think that was a grand sermon," she said.

It belonged to her, the stranger, to say it of Israel Heybrook's minister. She forgot, too, her pretty pique for the instant, in the great things they had been hearing. But Israel only quietly inclined his head for answer. Perhaps he, also, in the great things, forgot his purpose to "be polite."

There was enough to think of going down the pitches, where the colt doubled himself up with holding back; and before them was the glory of the vast hill region, wave beyond wave, melting at last, in faint blue outlines, into the blue, faint also, of the sun-filled sky.

France made no other attempt at conversation; when she sprang from the buggy upon the doorstone, she sprang at once away from whatever slight beginning she had made of an acquaintance with her companion. The butterfly was off the mullein-stalk. For days afterward it happened somehow that the girl never lit or lingered where Israel was, long enough to be looked at or spoken to. As for him, he never even "minded" that the mullein-stalk was empty. Perhaps, however, that last depends upon how far you go into the mind to find the minding. Perhaps Israel himself did not go far enough. If he had, he might have detected a little soliloquizing voice away back there, saying, rather persistently, "What difference does it make to me?"

CHAPTER V.

HIDE AND GO SEEK.

Now, when a young woman takes some care to keep herself out of a young man's daily way, and the young man is saying to himself what difference is it to him, their spheres, or atmospheres, are making, I fancy, some fine, delicate tangent of interest, — an interest that is often, as here, altogether due in its inception to some little kink of accidental reason, or unreason, for not allowing any possibility of interest at all. It might easily have been that these two should have come and gone in each other's sight all summer without more sense of concerning each other than a butterfly and — any noble, useful creature of different kind that you may choose; I cannot compare my Rael in such wise, distinct and different as his life and habit so far may have been from those of France. But those chance words had moved, in each of them, some question that would keep looking for an answer now; besides which, who can tell, even? for they were *not* butterfly and that other thing; they were human creatures; and so it was because of the very unlikeness between them in all outward place and accident that the human — yes, the male and feminine — in them, could but be drawn, perhaps, curiously at least, toward some thought and study of each other. What was queer about it now was the fact that, secretly studying the other, each was making most gratuitous efforts to hide from the other the actual self, under an exaggeration of the differing circumstances.

Israel wore coarser and rustier leather boots than he had any need to wear, and he hunted out, on some pretence of broader brim, the very brokenest and blackenedest old straw hat that had ever seen a haymaking. On the other hand, France, who hated the bother of much dressing, and had rejoiced over the

prospect of "living in a sacque," got up the most careful of toilets, and sat, as useless-looking as she could, under the great elm canopy before the door, or on the piazza; always flitting if Israel came near, or resting on her mullein-stalk with the serenity of a winged thing that knows she can lift herself instantly into the unreachable air if a coarse touch approaches.

And here was a yet queerer thing: that, through the whole, each quite clearly detected that the other *was* hiding, though both thought themselves effectually hid.

"He makes himself as horridly common as he can, because he supposes I'm not capable of understanding his uncommonness."

"She gets behind all that extra niceness because I'm not fit to be let see her as she is."

So that the queerest thing of the whole was brought to pass: that they were, in their wise notions of their own aspects in each other's minds, quite perfectly hidden from each other after all.

Sometimes, fresh from the field, straw hat in hand, and hair rumpled back, damp and curly, from his forehead, Israel would sit down on a piazza-chair or step, or on the doorstone, near Miss Ammah, finding her alone; and France would hear from within, or see, coming homeward from a walk, that they were talking cosily and easily together, and she was angry in her heart that this young man, to whom she never gave the slenderest opportunity, did not care to say a word to her; while he, listening for her step, or watching the far-off shine and flutter of her garments in the sun, would rise as soon as she came near and walk away, leaving her to her place and her better right.

"What *does* he find to talk about to you, Miss Ammah?" she asked very carelessly one day, when she came in with an armful of ferns, and could not bear it any longer.

"Oh, everything. All his plans. I've known him and all of them, you know, these five years."

"Has he got plans?" she inquired indifferently; as indifferently as she handled a great plumy cluster of superb, locust-like fronds, raising in her fingers the bit of root from which the

grouped stems sprang till she looked upward through its branchy forest and leafy cloud, yet seeming scarcely to notice that she looked up or that a lovely wonder was above her eyes. She might have been questioning whether one fine creation more than another could plan or change for itself, up here in these woods, other than to grow on just where it had been put.

"Of course he has, or had, and has now, — but different. He wanted to be an engineer. You 've seen his books about."

"Those physics and mechanics, — Ganot and the Calculus, and things? Are those his?"

"Why, don't you know they are? I saw you take one up yesterday, and it opened at the name in the fly-leaf."

"Did it?"

"France Everidge, I believe you 're looking the wrong way to see Rael Heybrook, or anything that belongs to him. You need n't undertake to look *down*."

"Do I?" persisted the girl lazily.

"Why do you bristle all over so with interrogation points? You are a positive porcupine."

"Am I? I trust that before I get away from Fellaiden it may be settled what order of natural history I belong to. I thought I was papilionaceous."

Miss Ammah gave her a keen glance; then she went back quietly to the beginning of the subject.

"He has had two terms in Boston at the Technological, and he meant to have worked his way abroad to study in the German schools. But his father went and upset it all by signing something ever so long ago, when Rael was learning his multiplication table, — a bond for somebody; and after it was all forgotten it went wrong, and came down upon him when Rael was just home for his second summer. And then there had to be a mortgage put upon the farm, and these boys have got to work it off. Lyman will have to be a doctor finally; it 's in him, and there 'll be suffering somewhere without the help that was made for it, Rael says, if it does n't come to use; besides, there 's longer time for Lyman. Israel is twenty-three, and he could n't get away these two or three years yet, and so he has made up his mind to take up with the farm and see the old

folks through. But he does n't give up his reading either. The truth of things is all the same, he says, and it 's just as good to find it."

"It is very good of him."

"Good? It 's magnificent!"

France got up, left all her load of pretty green lying on the settee where she had thrown it, and walked into the house with her one Royal Osmunda — anonymous to her, for she did not know ferns scientifically — in her hand. She went up to her room, set it in a tall blue-gray jar, and poured fresh water to it. She stood and looked at it a minute; turned it so that it rested more stately in its place, perfect in its every fair and manifold division.

"That is the sort of thing, then, that comes to life here, wild, among the fields; and I never saw it until now, and do not know it by name when I do see it."

She said it to herself more exactly than she reckoned: she saw the royal thing plain enough; she did not know by name, by place, or by the character that it had already taken with those who did know, — either the man or the cryptogam. She began to resent, confusedly, that she had been kept out of knowing.

CHAPTER VI.

HAY-SWATHS AND HIGH COURTESY.

After these days France Everidge tired, apparently, of that which she had pretended to bring here and put in contrast with sweet and vigorous realities. She tired of her separateness and her niceness; she walked oftener into the woods and down by the brookside; she made friends with Lyman, for she could talk with this boy; and she folded away her butterfly wings quite invisibly, finding it only worth while to be and to wear, from morning to night, that which left her freest to make part of the primal, delicious, busy life that earth and its creatures were living about her.

Lyman liked her. He was pleased when she came to the edge of his ploughed field, and stood there waiting with a question or a comradely word for him, till he got to the end of his furrow with his cultivator. He made odd half-hours of leisure, to go with her and show her where the maiden-hair grew, knee-deep in a green sea of beauty. He was the one now, nearly always, to drive her to church on the Sundays. Rael walked: two of the menfolks must always do that; and the sturdy old farmer could trudge over the hill as well as his boys, and thought, somehow, that one of the boys, new-suited with tailor's clothes, was fittest to drive the girl.

It happened one Monday, when the early haying was begun, that France, her breath and blood high stimulated with the oxygen of the hills in the clearest of hill mornings, flung down work or book with sudden impulse, and went off swiftly down the north mowing, where Lyman's machine, stridulous like a host of locusts, was making that "noise like a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble," and the air was fragrant with the dying breath of the falling grasses.

She stood and watched him along the lower swath, then up

toward her over the slope and along the upper margin of the great slope again, the stems dropping in a broad, even sweep beside his wheels, until he reached her, and stopped his team in the mid-line to speak to her.

"It 's like a war-chariot," she said. "They contrived that three or four thousand years ago, to mow down men. I wonder they never thought of it for grass before."

"Too busy their own way, maybe, counting 'all flesh as grass,'" said Lyman, getting off, and taking occasion to clear the guards. "They have n't beat all their spears into pruning-hooks yet, I presume."

"I wish I could ride there," said France. "Could I, for one round, do you think? Could you lead?"

"Of course," said Lyman; "ride all day if you want to." And he put her up, with great glee, into the iron-framed seat.

"O, it is perfectly lovely!" cried France, as the colt and Saltpetre started up again, and the whirr of the wheels and the click of the knives and the soft swish of the dropping stems began again. "I think I *shall* stay here all day." She folded her hands in her lap, and sat, like a Boadicea of the sweet millennium, riding down the gentle host of the herbage, consenting, with praiseful incense-breath, to be gathered to its use.

"What is that girl about?" cried Miss Ammah, coming upon the piazza in time to see her finishing her second round.

Some one else, at the same moment, was crossing the low wall from the roadway into the mowing, — Israel, hoe on shoulder, on his way from the turnip to the bean field. Just as they both saw her, the girl crouched down sidewise, giving a scream. "Stop, Lyman! Oh, I 'm caught!" she called out.

Lyman laughed, with one breath: he thought she meant she was discovered; with the next, when he had half turned his head, he shouted a tremendous "Whoa!" to his horses. The girl's gown was drawn into the cogs of the gearing-wheels: she was crouching down because she was being pulled down. Another revolution or two, and she might have been thrown before those hungry, clicking knives.

He had hardly reached her side, before Israel, flinging down his hoe, had run with great leaps to the horses' heads.

"They 'll stand," said Lyman, with easy drawl.

"It is n't going to be left to them," Rael answered quickly.

"All right! You hold on there," Lyman rejoined, half choking with fun, now, between France's dilemma and his brother's unwonted haste and heat, since he felt matters secure in his own hands.

Secure enough, but with some question: should he cut away the fabric in great tatters, or should he wait to unscrew the gearing? Meanwhile she was sitting there, frightened and ashamed, and painfully cramped in her forced position.

"Could you unfasten a belt or something?" he asked, the gentleman in him keeping uppermost with tolerable gravity, but the boy dying underneath with drollery.

"No, never mind! Tear it out, — cut it, — anyhow," France said impatiently, tied fast there to her own foolishness.

"There 's a lot of it," said Lyman, unclasping his knife. "I don't see how it all got in."

Rael patted the horses' noses, — kept his head the other side of theirs, — and neither interfered nor noticed further.

When France, released with the loss of a square half-yard of her dress-skirt, and with a grievous ruin beneath that in her gay blue balmoral, sprang from the carriage above, he passed around it below, came up from behind on the whole side of her, and walked with her up the hill.

Miss Tredgold was hurrying down.

France clutched her disarray fearlessly together with her right hand, and grew cool; feeling a most unspeakable acknowledgment within her to the farmer-fellow's quick good sense. If he were anywhere else in that big hay-field now, but just exactly where he was, how could she walk up over its crown, and not remember that his eyes might be following her in her absurd demolishment? That they would be, she did not believe at all, any more than we believe in the possible lurker in our dark rooms at midnight; yet she would have quivered at it, all the same, as we do. She was thankful, too, for a delay: there could be an ordinary word, now, to tone away that ridiculous impression of her which it was good he had not gone right off with, and which she never could have meddled with again, to try to mend.

"I hope I have not hindered your brother awfully. Will it break the machine?"

"Oh, no! that 's all right by this time."

"It was lovely up there," she said composedly; "just sailing along over the tips of the grass-heads, and seeing them slip down before the scythe."

"There is n't a prettier thing I know of than to ride a mowing-machine a day like this," said Rael. "I 'm glad you tried it; but Lyme should have taken better care. There was no need of any trouble."

How nice it was he said a "prettier thing"! He might have said "a jollier thing," or "better fun," which would not have let her off at all; but "prettier" was girlish, was ladylike; as if girls rode, or might ride, mowing-machines every day.

She could have counted the words she had ever exchanged with him thus far; she could have counted the words she had heard spoken of him: but she had learned of him beyond words already; she had learned a secret of nobleness, that was a key and a certainty for all his acts. This fine tact was but the large generosity moving upon minuter things, like the magnetism that keeps the earth-axis steadfast among the stars, and turns the tremble of the needle just as surely to its parallel.

Gentlemen, trained in courtesy from the time they could take their little hats off to make a bow, she had been among all her days. A simple *man*, in whom all courtesy showed itself just because it was and had to be, was like the beauty of noble hills after the measured prettiness of parks.

One of these gentlemen, a man making his mark now in the world, and with a good deal, really, to mark with, had approached her with such opportunity as he could get to approach a "middle sister" in a family of society like the Everidges. The elder ones counted him among their own availabilities: France knew very well what she could do if she chose. But this gentleman had quite forgotten something that France remembered with a tingle and a flash whenever she saw or thought of him. She had done a silly little thing, as girls of fourteen will, once; and this man, a youth then, full of sufficiency and conceit, had

quenched her for it. It was only that she had crossed a room, where a young party was assembled, with a certain trippingness, affected just then as a fashion among her schoolmates. It was prettier in a schoolroom, at recess, than in a drawing-room, in the edge of grown-up dignities. Very possibly it had not been adopted into drawing-rooms, or within that edge of dignity which is always just removed from the little catch-airs or the catch-words of the day. However that may be, our youth had presently after to cross the same space; and he had shortened and quickened his steps, and poised his elbows, in the slightest possible parody of hers. Nobody noticed it, perhaps, to trace the motive, but herself; her little performance might have been but one of many that provoked his ridicule as the girls'-nonsense of that day; but that man might rise — or sink — through the whole grade of American public preferment, and she would never see him but as a pert youngster, mincing across a parlor carpet to pain and shame the harmless, passing folly of a little girl.

Mrs. Everidge was keeping Frances back, now, like other mothers of many daughters; but it had occurred to her comfortably that there was a way for her to go forward, one of these days, whenever she herself might judiciously allow. France would have gone back into pinafores and learned all her way up again, certain enough to skip the flit-step when she came to it, sooner than forgive the mocking, and trust her possible remaining weaknesses to the mercy of the man who mocked.

But even this farmer had called her a butterfly. Had he, though? We know that he was finding less a likening for her than for his own indifference when he said it. Was it the indifference that made it stay by her so sorely? Not in the ordinary, personal way of girls looking insatiately and everywhere for personal admiration; but the woman in her, that always wants to stand representative of a worthy, beautiful womanhood to man, hated to be put by in such fashion and under such a type. And she kept thinking all through her swift-forming respects for him, "He does not believe me capable of comprehending."

Rael turned off when Miss Tredgold came to them, and struck obliquely from them, forward, toward the upper barns. He

knew he had forgotten his hoe, down there in the grass; but he just kept on and got another. He was feeling, scarcely saying, to himself, "She was a lady through the whole of it. How pure and pretty her enjoyment was; and how quietly she gave out that it was that, and not a romp! But she thinks I can't reach up to her ladyhood; she is careful not to take me on a level. Lyme may do; he 's only a boy; she can be comrades with him: she would have to make something like a friend of me, and she can't do that."

So they fell back into their old distances again.

CHAPTER VII.

SARELL AND EAST HOLLOW.

SARELL was going over to Hawksbury to spend a Sunday. She had had the promise of doing this once or twice in the season, as part of her summer bargain. She had one married sister living in Hawksbury, and another here, just this side of Fellaiden Centre. Sarell had these two households a good deal on her mind; besides which, there were affairs at Uncle Amb's, where she had "hired out" two winters, and where certain matters, that she did not want to lose the thread of, had linked themselves in her knowledge and interest, with her life and knowledge elsewhere, as we may come to see.

Sarell was a young woman to take up responsibilities as she went along. She liked them. She became naturally a part of whatever was happening in her Troy; and wherever her temporary Troy might be, there was pretty sure to be something happening. That, however, is true of all times and places; even under a burdock leaf or a stone is a whole world of event and action, any hour of a summer's day: the difference is in there being a looker-on, and a looker-on who is also a looker-in.

Sarell saw into things; she prided herself on that; and she could put things together. So that it fell in her way, as she said, "'most always," if she "picked up one piece, one time," to "pick up what it fitted on to, next." "If 't was an odd stocking to-day, it was the mate to it to-morrow."

As she moved back and forth, in her alternations of duty and concern, between Hawksbury and Fellaiden, and Uncle Amb's farm, that lay on the east line, just out of Sudley, carrying that "thread of things" and its responsibility with her, she made lines and connections, like the lace-work that grounds in and joins the pattern-figures of a web; since she never forgot

or failed to tie her knot where she saw a join ought to be, or where she could put forth a finger to make it.

Sarell knew very well the history of which Miss Ammah had given only the outline, without names, to France Everidge.

She knew old Puttenham held the mortgage on the Heybrook farm, the interest on which the farmer had to pay up each six months. She knew about Uncle Amb's bond that Farmer Heybrook signed, and had had to come down with the money for; and ever since she had known and understood that, she had been endeavoring to know and understand the secret of the "chastised meekness" of Deacon Ambrose's ostensible poverty, and the evident straightforward betterment and sure productiveness of his acres; also to reconcile, or confront, the same idea of poverty and resignation with the sharp, watching look in Mother Pemble's restless gray eyes, — the only part of her, except her hands, supposed to be capable of restlessness, in her bedridden helplessness of now some seven years' duration, — as they followed the deacon to and fro, or sent glances of a corkscrew sort of penetration into the very air, to pursue, as it were, the hidden twist there might be in his words which the air dispersed, at the times when he got pinned down, in spite of himself, by her bedside, to answer cross-examinative questions concerning plans, affairs, and results at the homestead.

"'Tain't fer nothin' she lays there, watching Uncle Amb' an' the big seckerterry," shrewd Sarell said to herself. For the big secretary could no more be moved from the "east settin'-room" than Mother Pemble herself, who had chosen and claimed that room of all the rooms in the house to be bedridden in.

Mother Pemble had the right; for when "Care'*line*," her daughter, married Ambrose Newell, twenty years before, Mother Pemble made over to her all the little property that Josiah, her husband, had left for them both; upon the making over to his wife, on the deacon's part, of the homestead farm, and to herself the written promise that she should have her board and maintenance from them, and the occupancy of such single room as she should elect in the dwelling-house.

Fond of money and control as Mrs. Pemble was known to be, everybody was surprised at the exchange of her independent means for this equivalent of maintenance. But Ambrose Newell was thought a thriving and a saving man in those days, and Mother Pemble had no one to think of but Care'*line*, who alone stood — as a child sometimes does, just better than nothing — between her soul and the perdition of utter selfish covetousness. For her, and to secure what she thought greater things for her future, she would do anything; and some tangible consideration, she had clearly seen, must help weigh down the scale of Ambrose Newell's inclination at the critical moment of its balance. This she put forth in the making known of what her plan would be, "if Care'line *should* marry, and take up with a home of her own." It had been as shrewdly led up to by Ambrose, in his friendly, tentative inquiry, of "how she would ever take it if Care'line should talk of settin' up in life like other folks?"

"I'd give up all I've got to her, an' she might take care of me," said the widow, a stout, capable body herself, twelve years younger than the deacon, which made their prospective relationship sufficiently absurd; quite as likely — and the deacon could take that into account — to lighten as to make care, for the next twenty years. "I've saved and spared fer Care'line; an' she may hev it. She won't begrudge me a corner, an' what I can eat an' put on; an' I've got good store of most things fer clothing, fer *my* lifetime."

So Ambrose pushed his good bargain; got his second wife, thirty years younger than himself, with a fresh face and bright, pretty, country ways; got his homestead and farm secured from all mishap to himself by that generous settling upon her; got also a "likely" mother-in-law to help look after pantry and dairy; while their two thousand dollars and their piece of land merged themselves in the working of the farm and in his speculations; for even up here, in the primitive hills, there were speculations for those who could get "forehanded" enough to enter into them.

There was a company in Hawksbury for the opening of a quarry, and the making of a bit of railroad to join the main line,

for transportation. Ambrose Newell went into this, and became a man of shares and mythical money-making. Care'line and her mother held their heads high, riding in and out of Hawksbury with him on his "business days."

All went on flourishingly, as appeared, for some years; the farm, Care'line's, turned in well in crops and stock; the farmer sold and invested. This was all personal, and his own affair: nobody knew exactly what he did with it, but the deacon was looked up to with deference, as a man who had money put by, until, at last, a crisis came, to which, forever after, could be referred all non-forthcoming of whatever he might have been believed possessed of.

Some new stone, that came rapidly into favor, began to displace the syenite of Powder Hill, and make riches for new men, down nearer the building markets. Dividends lessened, intermitted from season to season, then failed altogether; and at last there came a business day when the deacon's face looked black as he drove home alone from Hawksbury, having grimly refused the jaunt to his womenfolks when they had talked of it the night before. And in a few weeks the works at the quarry stopped; the affairs were to be wound up, which simply meant that the stockholders were to be apprised that there was nothing represented any longer by their certificates, unless they could come and take it out of the hornblende slate in Powder Hill; and that such of them as had other property were liable for their proportion of the last six months' debt for labor expenses at the works.

But this was not all as regarded Deacon Newell. He had held a certain trust in his hands, not large, as larger men would count it, but of essential importance to all concerned; and for this it was that Farmer Heybrook had put his name to bonds for his half-brother, long ago, and then forgotten all about it.

Nothing transpired, in connection with the other losses, at the time. Whatever load of his own Uncle Amb had to carry, and however he made it out, after the abandonment of the Hawksbury quarries, the interest of the trust got paid; but when in course of years the life-estate for which he held it

terminated, and the principal had to be forthcoming, there was nothing to show.

Not that he spread out empty and defaulting hands to the little world of Hawksbury and Fellaiden; he did not tell it to the church; he reversed the application of the New Testament precept, and first told his own delinquency, or as he expressed it, his "unfort'nitness," to his half-brother, to see what help or mercy he should find in him.

What the alternative might have been if Welcome Heybrook had taken him up roughly, I will not undertake to say; I do not pretend to know more than Welcome and his neighbors could find out; and nobody knew much of Uncle Amb's ways and means, any more in their restriction than they had done in their expansion.

Welcome turned pretty white for a minute, when the news came upon him; then he asked, "Have n't you got anything to settle it with?"

"Well, not of any accaount; I jest make out to scratch along, you see. I could raise two or three hunderds, maybe." And his eye sought Welcome's with a sharp, quick, sidewise glance that took itself back again before Heybrook met it.

Welcome Heybrook was as simple as a child. When Ambrose said, in his chastised way, "You k'n let it all aout, if you want to. I've bin dreadful unfort'nit, and I can't say a word; but I don't see as 'twould do either you or me a mite o' good," Welcome took upon his gentle, whole-brotherly heart all the burden of the other's fault, and the fear that followed it; and seeing, also, that no good could come, or evil be saved, to his own by any other course, since his written name would hold him liable for all the forfeiture, he just said, —

"I s'pose you 'll try to pay me by degrees. It 's a bad job for my boys —" and then could n't talk any more about it.

Uncle Amb said, "Certain, certain; he should pay it all up, ef he was prospered." And I am disposed to believe he meant it, in a dim, prospective way, when it should come easy to him; and that, at the moment, he really might not have been able to count out the ready dollars, having no farm of his own to mortgage, only a life interest, so to speak, in what he had

made over years before to his young wife. Perhaps, also, that "ef he was prospered" was a slant retainer upon Providence, — the Providence that "doth not suffer the righteous to be moved," — and that Uncle Amb, according to his dusky lights, believed in. It was a lien upon all the promises through this righteous brother, since it was clear that *he* should not come to confusion, and equally clear that it must depend, instrumentally, upon what should be given, through himself, to save him. It would even seem — or may seem to us, as we follow the story — that he was loth to relinquish this security, and discharge the account with Providence by the liquidation of the full claims of Welcome Heybrook. What difference did it make, so long as the farm did n't actually have to go? And he did n't mean to let it come to that pass, as a matter of course. But this anticipates.

The Heybrook farm, then, was mortgaged, and Deacon Newell's trust was rendered up without exposure; and every six months Welcome had to humble himself to ask his own of Ambrose in help, merely to meet the interest. And while the deacon "scratched along," and things looked as comfortable as ever at the East Hollow, everybody knew that somehow, notwithstanding clearer chances, and what all confessed to be first-rate good work, there was something that had run down hill with what ought to have been the profits of our friends at the West Side. Some laid it to the account of their ambitious education of their boys; and some guessed that it might date back to the deacon's first difficulties, when so much got buried up in the forsaken, grass-grown ledges. It was all in the family, and the Heybrooks were whist folks about their concerns always.

The deacon had no children. There had been two by the first marriage, but both died in early childhood. Care'line never had any. An illness, however, when, as matrons say, she was "disappointed," had been like the money disappointments of Uncle Amb, — an event to date all disabilities from; for, though stout of figure and florid of complexion, Care'line never got her full strength again from that time; and her strength, as regarded its application to domestic labors, had not been before altogether as her day was, — in fact, the day had not been *her*

day, which precisely makes the difference. She had never taken it to herself, or troubled herself much about it. The old lady, as a country dowager is always called, though, like Mother Pemble, still on the forenoon side of fifty, had done the work, and vigilantly "seen to things."

But by some most mysterious visitation, and even more mysterious acquiescence, considering her will and motive, Mother Pemble, some seven years ago, had broken down.

Elviry Scovel was hired in to help, and became a fixture. In busy times — haymaking, harvesting, and "sugarin' off" — a second assistant had to be called in; and people commiserated the deacon for the incompetency of his own womenfolks, and wondered how he ever got along with all he had to provide for.

That he did get along — "wonderful, certin, considerin' his afflictions" — was allowed on all sides. The deacon himself never complained, except so far as to say to Welcome on interest days, that it "was tollable hard, hevin' to kerry both ends," and that he "s'posed it was all for the best, but it did seem as if the luck did n't get sorted in this world; at least, it was allers pretty much one kind that come to his house."

It did not look, certainly, as if the main debt to the Heybrooks were likely to be repaid.

It was usually Sarell Gately who filled the extra needs at East Hollow for spring and fall work; she, for some reason of her own, would come for very "reasonable" pay, which meant, as we have all, perhaps, noticed on the one side of such reckoning, something rather below reason in regard of cheapness.

Care'line and Elviry "laid it to the score" of Hollis Bassett, the "hired boy," whose boyhood had reached the count of some fifteen hayings and harvestings since he first began to handle a rake, or gather apples into barrels in the deacon's Long Brook orchard.

Hollis was a handsome fellow, in a sunburnt, country fashion, with a kind of rollicking sauciness in his Yankee speech, and an ease and unconstraint in the rustic bearing that had never been rebuked into awkwardness, that were "taking with the women." But he was fonder of fishing than of hoeing, and would waste half a day after a woodchuck when he was supposed to be busy

with chopping or piling in the wood-loft. Then on Sundays he would wear fine store-clothes, and come into church with his wavy brown hair redolent of bergamot, leaving a hired "team" in the shed outside, in which he would invite the favored girl of the day to ride with him after the two services were over, round into Reade or Hawksbury or Wakeslow, or over by the pond or the ledges in the sunset.

There was only Sarell Gately, of all the girls in Fellaiden, who never seemed to care for these serenely secure askings of his; who never lingered in his way upon the church steps or green, and who had even, now and again, refused the public pride and felicity of being handed in to the seat by his side. Perhaps the pride of turning quietly away homeward had been the greater. However, Sarell was always willing, except when promised or employed at the Heybrooks', to come to Uncle Amb's for a spell of work; and Hollis would feteh her to and fro, or she would let him come for her at the West Side farm for her trips into Hawksbury. There was the difference of being waited on for a real service, at her own need and pleasure, and that of waiting *his* pleasure for a favor common to every good-looking girl in the three parishes.

Sarell knew quite well what was worth while, and what was better missed than made.

It was Hollis Bassett who stood this Saturday evening on the front doorstone at the Heybrooks', holding the trim lines of his "livery team." He had on a bran new wide-awake and a brown linen duster, and had got himself up with a knowing pair of driving-gloves; but Rael Heybrook passed him with a nod whose mere civility was aggravating, and Mother Heybrook, through the parlor blinds, looked out at him with a face in which an anxious doubt predominated.

Sarell came in to see by the parlor glass that her overdress was bunched up right and that her whole effect was self-creditable.

Mrs. Heybrook turned up a green leaf that had got twisted beside the red rose in the hat-brim. She took the moment to say softly, "It ain't my business, Sarell, but I'm a kind of mother to you, you know; and his looks may misreppersent him,

but I *don't* half feel he 's to be calculated on for anything real substantial."

The tone was interrogative in its deprecatory gentleness of suggestion ; and Sarell looked back at her with something just a little less smart and off-hand than usual in her air, though she answered, " He 's all right, Mrs. Heybrook, thank you. I know just what he *is* good for, and just where to keep him. If I did n't take him in hand a little, he *would* be spoiled ; and 't would be a pity he should be throwed away."

" She talks as if he was preserves or pickles," said good Mrs. Heybrook to herself. " An', too, I s'pose a man *is* better worth saving, if it don't waste the sugar it 's done with," she added, walking off meditatively to her quiet, cool kitchen, which was all done up, and waiting for Sunday.

CHAPTER VIII.

GOOD AT A HOLD-BACK.

All the girls in Fellaiden, except Sarell, and a good many of the older women were more or less overawed by the outside presentment of Hollis Bassett. They thought he was "real smart," a notch above the ordinary measure of men about their country neighborhood. He talked high and large to everybody but Sarell, to whom he ventured the same things with a certain cringe of self-distrust and bespeaking of support or even toleration, about future intentions. He was n't always going to hire out on a farm; no, nor farm it anyway. Some time, and before long, he meant to get into "mercantyle" life, buying and selling; that was the work for him. There was a chance for trade, now, in Wakeslow. He had got an idea when he was down to Boston; and whenever he could lay by a little something that he could call capital, he meant to show 'em how.

All this, and a good deal more, asserted with that fine, free, confident air of his, impressed his ordinary hearers as brilliant in enterprise and wisdom. It was only Sarell whom he could not impress; because he failed to be impressed with himself in her presence.

Her penetration, her judgment — and he felt it — went straight down through all this style of his to the actual capacity underneath; and her sentence, pronounced in blunt vernacular, cut through to the quick of his own common sense, which, after all, underlay his fine pretension. For she was not even misled the other way by his small, transient flashiness; she knew that, though the "smartness" was a fiction, and his ambition in clothes and talk a folly, the man could do a man's work if he were kept at it, and that his would-be knowingness was the most childish innocent affectation in the world. "If she did not take him in

hand, he *would* be spoiled." This was the secret of her interest, so far as Hollis Bassett himself was concerned. That there was other matter and motive which had caused her so to study and possess herself of her character, will directly and without prolonged mystery appear.

"I was over to Wakeslow, yesterday," remarked Mr. Bassett, as they came safely down the last crooked pitch of the Heybrook Hill into Clark's Hollow. "The old man had some hay to send in. I did n't more 'n half like my errand. 'T was a mixed lot, as uzhal. The corner loft was swep, over into the little bay, afore the new loads were all in. Deacon Amb's an underwater old fellow, that 's a fact."

Sarell's face lit up; not that she was "rejoicing in the iniquity," and "underwater"-ness; only that somehow, when Hollis Bassett gave himself a chance, and let his own straightforwardness, or such plain power as he did possess, appear, it gave her an instant sense of comfortable corroboration in her mind.

The next sentences were not so satisfying, however.

"I talked a little with Goodsum; cautious, you know. He 's got a hundred, from his last teaming. He 'd put in, fast enough. And that little house of Maxon's is finished, and he 's in. The corner room 's a beauty, winders both ways, and the door and the steps between. I don't see what you 're set against it for. 'T would jest wake up Wakeslow."

"For a week, maybe. How long do you s'pose 't would take to collect all the dollar-bills that 's layin' round loose, out there?" Sarell spoke with supreme contempt.

"O, I 've been thinkin', since I talked it over to you before." He did not say "with you": it was a careful distinction for Hollis. "Come to, I would n't make it a dollar-store, nor yet a ninety-nine-cent one. Wakeslow and I 'd be a good deal of a muchness, about supply and demand, I guess. I 'd make it a *forty—nine—cent* one!" He announced his grand idea with long hyphens, and in italics. "Nobody 's tried that, anywhere, I don't believe. It would jest *tell!*"

"I 'd make it nineteen, if I was you," said Sarell, without the least enthusiasm, "or nine. Any little boy can play

shop," she added. "I presume you 'll get your money back. But I don't know about rent. That ain't play."

Hollis gave his horse a flick with his whip, and then drew him up suddenly, as he plunged rather unceremoniously over a water-bar.

"You 're good at a hold-back," he said to his companion, borrowing the severe irony of his rejoinder from the circumstance of the moment.

"It 's a good thing, going down hill," remarked Sarell serenely. "I alwers think the britchin 's the best part of the harness."

"Well, then, what *would* you do, Sarell Gately?" after a pause.

"I 'd be as perlite as I could," said Miss Gately, coolly crushing him in his tenderest pretension. "An' then I 'd stay where I knew I was some use, an' safe, fer a while, an' if I wanted to keep store one of these days, I 'd *keep* store." There were barrels and bales in her enunciation and emphasis; they made Hollis Bassett feel as small as one of his own forty-nine-cent packages.

But he held his chin up presently again, — a handsome chin, with a soft dark beard about it. "I should like *my* wife," he said with some magnificence, and carefully shunning the clipping of his words, "to live in a village, amongst folks; in a white house with green blinds, and my name on a door-plate."

"Well, I hope she will, if you want her to," said Miss Gately, with perfect presence of mind; "only I don't believe the way to it would be by a forty-nine-cent store."

Nevertheless, the picture had not been without its effect upon her farm-bred imagination; and it was with a little less superiority that she diverted the conversation with the inquiry, "How 's Mother Pemble these times?" and then added, with significance, "There 's more responsibility over there to East Holler than you mistrust, Hollis; there ought to be *one* honest man about the place, an' a clear-headed one, for all folks' sakes."

Hollis wondered in his secret mind what on earth she meant. But a man never lets a shrewd woman get the apparent start

of him. At least he never thinks he does; he answers in a hurry to her suggestion, perhaps quite setting it aside in his superior keenness, as though there were things, notwithstanding her cleverness, that he cannot quite venture to discuss fully with her. Perhaps his hurry and his reticence tell their own story, and she has her own little counter-reserve concerning his sagacity.

Hollis spoke quickly, though his eye shot an inquiry in advance of his words, and his face was blanker than he knew with surprise. The nod of his head came a little behindhand for due effect.

"I 've mistrusted considerable," he said, in a wary way. "You may depend everything ain't exactly as it seems, over there, clear through. I 've *my* doubts about Mrs. Newell being quite the invaleed she makes out to be." And there he paused a second, with a glance again, to note whether he had hit upon the responsive string. "*I* b'lieve she gets up nights an' helps herself in the pantry, 'r else what keeps her so fat, while she pecks at her reg'lar food like a chicken?"

If he had been an unmodified Yankee, he would have said "Mis' Newell," and "victuals." But he had not come so far in his culture as to put the "u" into "regular," or to be content with both "i" 's alike in "invalid." It is interesting to watch the little steps, and corresponding halts, in human progress.

Sarell flashed her red rose and her bright eyes round at him, with something a great deal more definite in their question than his own tentative glances had conveyed, while he stated his impression; but when he adduced his reasoning, the grasp of her expression relaxed out of her face, as if failing of what it caught at; and she said with impatience, her look turned disregardingly upon the wheel-tire as it followed the rut on her side, "O, if *that 's* all, folks that are fat never *air* great eaters. I thought mebbe you 'd really noticed something."

"Well, I have," returned Hollis slowly, as one who still had a large fund of information to draw on at discretion, "but I never thought it worth while to *take* notice. It 's hern, fair enough, if she wants it; it 's all her own; but why don't she

take it in daylight? Only night before last, there was half a custard pie in the back buttery that was gone in the mornin' when I went in for the milk-pails, and 'f I did n't hear somebody up and round underneath my room that had petticoats on, — well 't was the cat, then; or the rooster."

"Petticoats!" ejaculated Sarell musingly. And then she turned full face upon Hollis. "Don't you take notice, for your life, to anybody but me. But do you notice every bit you can, and tell me. There 's queerer things than ghosts in some families. But you can't prove a ghost by hollerin'. That only scatters 'em. On your word an' honor, Hollis, don't tell anybody an identical word but me, an' tell me everything!"

Hollis laid down the reins in his lap, and returned her look in sheer astonishment. Then his wise pre-eminence recollected and reasserted itself. He lifted the reins, with a careless twitch and a chuckle to the horse.

"I 'll see about it," he said. "I 'd sooner obleege you than most folks."

"See you do then," said Sarell uncompromisingly, perceiving quite well that she had obtained all from him that he had to give at present; and she dropped the subject, with the interest and the mystery all on her own side.

In a few minutes more, they drove down the long, green Valley Street of Hawksbury.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EAST ROOM AT EAST HOLLOW.

Mother Pemble's latch was down.

Deacon Ambrose, coming in with papers in his hands, through the little keeping-room and passage beyond, to the door at the end that opened into Mother Pemble's room at its back corner, found it so. He also smelled, as he stood there and turned softly the useless outer knob, an odor of origanum and other pungent oils.

"Ca-at!" he sputtered, letting the whisper drop from the corners of senile-spreading lips, like a drool of acrid poison; "rubbin' her old paws, and goin' to sleep over it! She would n't wake up this ha'af hour, 'f she heared me comin'."

So he released the knob as softly as he had tried it, turned noiselessly, — for Deacon Amb was of the cat species himself, and had a way of slipping off his out-door, heavy shoes and entering the inner rooms with woollen-stockinged feet, — and went down the blind little passage to the keeping-room, where he slid his papers into the inside breast-pocket of his stringy alpaca coat, took the last number of the Reade Weekly Watch-word, and sat down, to weary out contrariness with a patience every bit as contrary.

"One for the last play, Mis' Pemble!" he whispered again, nodding virulently toward the open passage. "'N I guess I 'll hold out 's long 's you will, 'f ye air laid up to keep, there, so comfortable. Ye may *lay*, and *look*, and *listen;* an' bedrid folks may last forever, s they say; but good legs, 'n keepin' abaout on 'em, 's a better resate, 'cordin' to my notion. 'N my father was ninety-nine year an' six days, to a minute, when he died."

Mother Pemble had heard that often enough; it was like

"Selah" in the Psalms, to the deacon's topics and sentences; he managed to get it in, or to wind up with it, whatever he began with.

But "things ain't never as you count on," Mother Pemble said to herself. "He 's got that ninety-nine year an' six days so set in his mind that he 'll slip up in one of the seventies yet, while he 's a lookin' forrud to it. An' if *there* ain't a cretur surprised, there never was one. I 'd like to be a fly on the wall, in t' other world, to see him come in!"

All the flies in Egypt could not have been in all the places where Mother Pemble had wished herself "on the wall" in that wise.

Meanwhile, she was, as a fly on the wall, in the "east settin'-room," with the big "seckerterry," against the opposite wall, or rather against the door into the front passage of the house, which she would have closed in that way when she first took to her bed and her imprisonment here. The south parlor, opposite, had a second entrance from a little porch of its own, through which visitors often came and went. Mother Pemble "did n't want to be all out-doors," she said.

The east room was large and pleasant enough to dispense with that communication. Its two windows to the sunrise, — a little south of east, so that they were sunrise windows all the year, and gave long mornings of instreaming light and warmth even late into the winter, — and its one wide one, with sliding shutters, to the north, looked out brightly across broad meadows on the one side, to far, beautiful, wooded hills and blue peaks; and on the other up against a near sheltering slope that was green now with huckleberry pastures and pine woods, and in the winter broke the force of wind and storm, and gave warm shelter upon that side the farmhouse. There was a recess, under the front stair-landing, beyond the secretary, on the same side, that opened through a closet in the remaining space under the same, into the parlor; so that in the hot, southerly days she could have the breeze through there, without exposure or intrusion; for her bed stood in the east corner, with the north window to her right and the southeasterly ones to her left, as she lay.

Mother Pemble was very particular to have this closet door kept bolted on her own side, at all times except just in those "hot spells" when she must have the air from that way. At night she would always have it fastened. The big secretary was hidden from entire view by the high footboard of the bedstead. She could not see what Ambrose drew forth or stowed away in its antique receptacles, when he sat before it, fumbling, in his slow, tiresome fashion, among his papers. Ambrose chuckled and grinned to himself over this; and would doubtless have long ago insisted on the secretary being moved elsewhere, had it not been for the satisfaction of keeping his affairs and his hidden deposits right there, "under Mis' Pemble's nose, as 't were," and yet utterly beyond her observation and cognizance.

Whether foolishly, or with a sly relish of some sort yet deeper than Uncle Amb's, she gave him an opportunity, every now and then, for a full tasting of his side of the enjoyment.

For instance, "What are you turnin' over there, Amb?" she asked at one time, when a voluminous rustle of some clean, crisp documents had struck her ear.

"Old stiffikits," he answered her; and then came a thump, as he lifted some heavy ledger down upon the desk from a higher shelf.

"Old fiddlesticks!" she returned, but not out and out crossly, either; for Deacon Amb and Mrs. Pemble were always pretty civil, conversationally, to each other. "What do you want to keep 'em for, let alone rummagin' 'em up, the whole durin' time?"

"O, yer never know when things may come up to be of conserquence. I like to keep old scores where I can lay hand on 'em."

"Air they all *old* scores, Ambrose? Air ye sure ye ain't dippin' into anything niew?"

"What 'v I got to dip with, Mother Pemble?"

"O, I d'know, yer turnin' things over all the time, an' ye ain't bound to nobody. Care'line, she ain't got the curiosity of a miskeeter. Not half," she emended, as the excess of her illustration occurred to her. "I 'd like to be a fly on the wall up there over that old seckerterry."

"I lay ye would, Mother Pemble," came from the deacon, in

a tone that showed his lips were wide stretched, and vibrant with an inward tickle.

"Ef ye die, Amb, leave me the old seckerterry, and whatever 's in it, will ye?"

"I ain't agoin' to die."

"What, never?"

It was before the days of Pinafore.

"Well, not in your time. My father lived to be ninety-nine years an' six days, to a minute."

"You won't."

"Why?" the deacon was putting together and tying a file of papers, and eked out the conversation to his employment, which he was thus finishing.

"'Cause yer alwers talkin' about it; an' things that 's alwers talked about never come to pass."

"I was talkin' about my father, and he came to pass, as I tell yer. Ye can't alter that with any talkin'."

The deacon shut a ponderous drawer, and turned the key in a sounding lock. Then the bunch of steel rattled as he dropped it into the depth of his trousers pocket. He turned to cross the room diagonally to the keeping-room passage.

As he did so, he stopped short on the other diagonal, between the bed with Mrs. Pemble in it, and a little door, beneath which a wooden step protruded, beside the chimney, that ran up in the fourth corner.

"How come that on the jar?" he asked.

"Care'line was up ther yist'day afternoon, after some elderblows; 'n the cat come down this mornin'. She never latches a door; an' the cat 's forever at her heels. I just hev t' lay here, t' the mercy of everything," she ended, turning her head on the pillow with an articulated sigh.

"That 's so," said the deacon blandly.

The door that was ajar only led up into a little, sloping attic.

Mother Pemble's extra latch, that had no thumb-piece on the outer side, was down, now, heavy and fast, in its deep iron catch; the deacon waited, the flies buzzing about him as he read the Watchword, and the smell of the origanum penetrating all the way out here.

It was no use to rattle or knock. It was her one defence and privilege; and Mother Pemble asserted it to the utmost.

The door was across the room, opposite her bed; but a stout linen cord, knotted through a drill-hole in the latch, passed, by means of a couple of pulleys, up the wall and along a beam in the old ceiling, to where it could drop, at her right hand, down to a brass button in the edge of the bedstead frame beside her. When the loop in the end of the cord was around the button, the room was fast against intrusion. Mother Pemble could sleep, or think, or patch her calico pieces, or knit her shells, or read her Bible, — which she actually did do without disturbing that side of her mind upon which another sort of latch was down, — in the most absolute quietness. When the loop three inches back along the line was buttoned, all the world, that was ever welcome, was welcome to come in. And Mother Pemble was clever enough not to drive her world away from her by fidgetiness and petulance. She only "would have her own time to herself when she wanted it," she said, "sence 't was all she *could* have, in the way of independence."

True, she had her "kicksy-wicksy" days, as Sarell has said; days when it was "clear torment for her to lay still and keep herself out o' things that she *knew* she could straighten out if she was only round amongst 'em"; for she kept the run of all that went on in the household, and the hitches in the running, and had a word upon most matters, as much as ever. *How* tormenting it was for her to submit to her outward inaction, perhaps no one with all her "kicksy-wicksiness" could comprehend. Wherefore, as her easy-going Care'line said about it to the deacon, in slow, soft speech, with her mouth far parted in her vowel emphasis, "We must take *all* things into consider*a*tion."

"That 's so," the deacon would assent, quite comfortably, in like manner as he assented to its being "to the mercy of everything" that she did lie there so helpless.

"The ways of Providence is the best ways," he was wont to declare with meekness.

When Mother Pemble heard him say that, a queer gleam of satisfaction would come into her restless gray eyes, as if she

and Providence had some private and more express understanding.

She had a good deal, moreover, in the way of independence, besides her seclusion at will. She would do all for herself — and, to do her justice, a good deal for other people — that two hands in the stationary radius of the reach of hers could do.

She diligently rubbed the hands and the arms with the strengthening liniment, "to hold on to what was left of her." The lower limbs were supposed to rest, almost helpless, beneath the bedclothes. Not paralyzed exactly, she always insisted upon that, but as good as paralyzed with the weakness of disuse. For the trouble that had "settled in her back" seven years ago had prevented her from lifting herself to a supporting attitude all that time. She had given up to her necessity, and turned her capableness to the devising and directing of every little means for rendering her establishment comfortable to herself, and the care of it easily manageable by others.

Her bed was double; one half was thoroughly made up while she lay upon the other. And a swing sacking, in the place of a sheet, raised and lowered by pulleys, passed her from one side to the other, and was then unbuckled at its corners and drawn away, leaving her upon the fresh one; whose corners, in turn, were buckled to corner straps upon the mattress, making a smooth, unruffleable spread beneath her, so essential a comfort to an invalid, and could remain so fixed for several days.

A large shallow bag, which nobody ever meddled with but herself, hung at her hand by the bed-frame. Here she had her handkerchiefs, her liniment and other bottles, her knitting-work, and all the small appliances and accumulations of her circumscribed existence and occupations. When she wanted these cleared out or disposed of, she attended to it as one of her diversions. She was "sufferin' neat," as Elviry said, and kept all these heterogeneous affairs purely distinct, undefiled, and undefiling. Every bottle was tightly corked and scrupulously dried to a clear polish; every piece and bit rolled away in its proper separation. "It was wonderful how few rags and towels she did use, considerin' all her rubbin' and hand-washin', and meal-takin' in bed."

A lap table, with socket holes and upright edges, came down and ascended again, at her own touch, between the ceiling and the bed before her, with convenient furnishings ready set; a flat drawer in it held napkins and towels. A washbowl, set in the mouth of a dark-wood cylinder, which held a capacious receptacle for the waste from it, was arranged with a lid which could be pushed around aside upon a swivel; and the whole, mounted on three short legs with casters, constituted a lightstand table. The swivel-rod at the back branched above into a support for an upper shelf, upon which stood a water-jar with a faucet. This had been an intricate study and a sublime achievement between herself and the cabinet-maker of Reade. A smaller basin of tin, which she could set before her upon the bed, and a little dipper, hung at the side of the cylinder.

Specific mention of these, as among the arrangements by which the recluse could help and amuse herself, with her skilled and yet active hands, in really quite a little housekeeping of her own, will enable the credit and comprehension of possibility in regard to certain things that must have been possible to the enactment of her part in all that follows, to be told.

There was nothing but the most primitive simplicity in them all; no plumber or modern mechanic would ever have so contrived them; they were like a hundred household devices and expedients usually confined to dairy and kitchen, not extended to personal luxury or indulgence, which these farmer-folk set at work to serve their turn, without waiting for machinist or patent. Mother Pemble had thought them all out, one by one, as she came to the requirements which they answered. A few gimlet and auger holes, bits of pipe, hooks and pulleys, carried them into operation; the old raftered ceiling and solid woodwork of her room gave hint and place for their appliance.

The neighbors thought they were "dreadful 'cute, and must save the other womenfolks a sight of work": that was all. Nobody regarded them as in the least allied to pretence or splendor; though with a little concealment of their easy gear, or refinement of external form, they might figure among the last touches of exquisite invention in any fine city palace, where living is sublimated almost above the hindrance or reminder of any common needs.

Mother Pemble washed her own cups and saucers and spoons; replaced them upon her table, and swung the table up out of her way. She rinsed out her bits of linen and flannel. She made her own tea with the "sperrit lamp," whenever she wanted it, which was apt to be at very odd hours; odder, maybe, than the household knew. Whatever else she did, that perhaps gave object and relief to her monotonous restraint, may come in in its further order and relation.

She accomplished the family mending and quite a vast amount of useful and ingenious making, with needle, knitting-pins, and rug-hook.

"I don't get any more done for me than I do back," she said often to others, and yet more often to herself. She seemed to keep some kind of account, in this wise, with her conscience; perhaps with the Bible, that lay beside her on the lightstand.

When at last the big latch clicked upward, this afternoon that Deacon Ambrose waited, he waited on some fifteen minutes longer.

"She 's in more of a tiew th'n I am," he said complacently, to himself; then, having secured knowledge that he could enter at his pleasure, without betraying his waiting and watchfulness by any second ineffectual trial at the door, he even slipped on his heavy, shuffling shoes again, picked up his straw hat, and walked out at the end door and around past her north window, toward the barnway.

Mother Pemble contracted the muscles of her upper lip, as his shadow went across her daylight, so that the tip of her nose elevated itself, and the nostrils expanded, with a fine, amused scorn.

"'Z if I could n't see through that!" she said to herself. "He 's got something more 'n common to stow away or to git aout, he 's so turrible unconcerned. 'N to-merrer 's Hawksberry day, 'm — 'm!"

She knit on; half a white shell for the pretty bedspread that she was making, of soft, smooth, slender cotton cord.

"Heap it up, heap it up! yer don' know who 's t' gether it and that 's a fact! nor haow!" she added, with a silent laugh, that showed good firm teeth and the only two wrinkles in her

cheeks, that were but the lengthened and deepened dimples of her youth. "There 's other things savin' up that ye don't calk'late on. What might 'a been all wore out by this time, and Care'line left t' shift f'r 'erself. 'T ain't bus'lin' raound that brings things t' pass, alwers, not even in haousework. — You save up dullars, and I 'll save up years!" and the still laugh came again.

She dared say that to herself and laugh that laugh, with that bound word of the Lord of all days and years lying beside her at her right hand, wherein she read, "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." And, "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night."

Such things men and women do read in the Scripture of the Book, and of events all around them, and yet set their own word and their own act, as things separate from the line and order of God's; or somehow able to establish their motive and security upon some partial point or base of his law, alongside their unshakable certainties.

Ambrose Newell was a self-seeking, secret man; he was to be circumvented. That was a piece of everlasting justice. "Why was he to keep his goods back, and the good of 'em, all his life long, and turn clear honest only after he was dead and could n't care?" Mother Pemble would see to that. She thought the circumvention lay in her hands. "After he was dead, it would be other folks' turn to care, and to make up their minds. 'T wan't to be his say, whose rights came fust and whose was biggest. 'F he *did* put it all inter pussonal."

Ambrose came in, and unlocked the old piece of furniture at its grooved front, that rolled back from before its pigeon-holes and drawers in the way imitated again of late years, let down the desk-board, unlocked and pulled out the deep right-hand drawer below it, sat down in the big armchair with its sheaf-shaped carved bars at the back,— an heirloom in itself to modern-antique covetousness,— and settled himself and his handful of papers for work.

There was an elliptical space between the corner-post of the

bedstead and its scrolled footboard that was in one solid middle piece, through which Mother Pemble, over her glasses and her knitting, could see his right arm and hand, and that right-hand drawer, projected, open, below the desk-board. Her needles clicked indefatigably; her eyes as indefatigably followed every movement in that half view.

The deacon drew a wallet and a pair of scissors from a pigeon-hole. Mother Pemble saw the clear shine of the steel as he took them down from their upper corner, and again the lip-muscles shortened and the nostrils spread.

A quiet unfolding of some crackling, parchment-like sheet, and — after a reflective interval such as a careful man is apt to observe between the taking out of his pocket-book and the abstraction of any of its money contents — a soft clipping, with an inevitable gentle rustling, followed.

"What 'r ye doin', Ambrose?" asked the old lady, as she always asked.

The deacon's lips stretched in the opposite way from that of the uplifting of her's. The long, in-fallen line between the shrunken jaws grew longer and set tighter, and his eyes twinkled in a corresponding lengthening and closure of their lids.

From between the lips, in sound as if he held a pin between, came the answer,— such a one as usual,— "Cutt'n up old papers, mother. Wan' t' make some lamplighters?"

"Some time, p'r'aps. Not now, Amb."

Then the scissors clipped again; cut slowly, rather, as a man uses them; with as much accent in the opening as in the closing of the blades.

"Them scissors squeak, Amb. Ain't ye 'fraid they 'll tell somethin'?"

"Scissors' all right, mother."

"Then *you* squeak, handlin' of 'em. Somethin' squeaks."

Mother Pemble's longitudinal dimples were very deep, with her pleasure at her own deep under-meaning.

"Ther 's alwers something squeaks when I 'm busy at this 'ere seckerterry," returned Uncle Amb, his facial parallel of latitude extending itself in correspondence with Mother Pem-

ble's meridian lines. If they could have seen each other they might have enjoyed their game still more. Perhaps they would have had to play it yet deeper.

"Ambrose," said the old lady, after a pause in which she had knotted off one shell, laid it aside in the little basket on her table, and increased her first single stitch toward another by a few turnings to a number that held her needle comfortably well, "I should n't be a mite surprised — sha'! I 've missed a stitch! — I should n't be a single mite surprised — and I b'lieve my heart you air — ef you was a cuttin' off cowponds."

"'F I was, I guess yer heart 'd hev y' aout an' afoot to see abaout it, 'f ye hed t' go thriew a hoss-pond!" And Uncle Amb folded up the crackling paper.

"'Taint the age o' merricles; 'n yit ther might be sech a thing 's 't I sh'd be aout n' abaout, f'r all, afore I die. 'F I ain't, I will be after, 'f ye don't keep things straight an' aboveboard, Ambrose Newell, — 'n I go fust. That I tell ye."

"Ye 'd like to be a fly on the wall, would n't ye?" retorted the deacon, rising up and rolling forward the secretary front again, and turning the key, shutting and locking the deep drawer also, as he folded back the desk-lid. "Ye 'd buzz, would n't ye? Well, I should n't kind o' wonder ef 't was what ye *would* be, 'f the Lord saves all the pieces, an' makes the most he can out o 'm."

"I s'pose ye know what kind o' stuff calls the flies the most, deacon. An' ef there 's any buzzin after you, 't 'll be because o' somethin' in the natur' o' things, I persume."

Mrs. Pemble always called her son-in-law "deacon" when she gave him the most despiteful thrusts. The deacon in him was truly the thing she despised most of all.

The tall secretary, with its age-dark, polished front and cresting carvings, its three bright, pineapple-shaped gilt knobs on the three highest points of these, stood straight and massive and still, holding its secrets; and the deacon walked away, his keys jingling in his pocket.

The old lady, whom he left lying there in a Tantalus plight that was safety and exultation to him, however, and the more because it was bitterly aggravated penance to her, waited

till she heard him go away out through the keeping-room to the shed-kitchen, where a swing-door flapped to after him.

Then the knitting-work dropped upon the counterpane; a hand reached to the cord and the brass button, changed the loops, and the iron latch fell with a small clang; the gray eyes gave a swift glance to the muslin-shaded windows, right and left, whose weighted lines hung over the high, uncurtained frame of the bedstead, to be also within her command; and the figure of the woman raised itself straight up from her pillows, and sat erect.

"When I come even with him," she said,— Mother Pemble talked much to herself in her imprisonment, in a low, careful, monotonous voice, without ever thinking of the convenience of the present chronicle,— "the only damper 'll be that he won't be here to know. 'Less — ther 's no tellin'— it *might* come so 's 't he 'd be fixed some as I be, fer awhile. I *might* be gitt'n abaout, 's he 'd be clampin' daown. I 'd like t' be sett'n 't that seckerterry *once*, when he could n't do nor say nothin', only *look!* The world 's a troublesome kentry, but it turns itself over every day: we must jest wait, 'n see how the times rolls raound!"

She sat half an hour in her erect position; then she shortened the latch-cord again, and laid herself back as they always saw her.

She drew the muslin shades up also. The rosy reflection of the sunset light was full upon the soft clouds that were floating away, over the distant woods, against the breasts of the great hills. The bare scarp, even, of storm-whitened granite on the top of the north ridge was flushed with a lovely pink. Over its line lay the mellow saffron-green that spread along the sky from where the sun, still far up in the summer latitude, was going down in an ocean of pure gold.

"It 's a charmin' pleasant evenin'," Mother Pemble said wistfully, looking out into that sereneness of pure atmosphere and the glory that infilled it. She sighed as she said it, as one might sigh who had lost the freedom of sunsets and sweet, warm atmospheres, except as they might creep in to her, with a kind of pitying mercy, through door and casement, or glow

down upon her from afar, in mere scraps and hints of that which was widening and shining all round the blessed bend that held and brooded over the fruitful, sky-seeking hills.

"It 's a pleasant time ; but 't ain't my time. I 'll hev t' wait f 'r that. Well, it 's a good day that 's alwers comin'. It 'll be fair to-morro', f 'r Ambrose t' go t' Hawksberry."

And with that, those sinister old wrinkle-dimples deepened up her cheeks again, and her eyes took a cold, malign brightness, like the steely glitter of low-lying, dangerous water, in secret clefts where a true dayshine never comes.

She did not look at the sunset color afterward. When she remembered it again, it had slipped from the hill-tops and the cloud-edges, and they were gray with falling shadow.

Yet away down in the west, where she could not see,— having shut herself, of her choice, to the shady side of her world,— there were purples, and flecks of flame, and here and there, between the mountain-swells, sweet pools of distant amber, lying still and clear, like lakes of heaven.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT PYRAMID.

One night, Miss Tredgold stayed out walking and talking with Rael till it was late, France waited for her, wondering, with a letter that had come for her by a chance hand from the village from the later mail.

They had gone down into what France called "The Pleasaunce," — a great natural park of noble groups of elms upon a slope, and spreading through a hollow, turfed with crisp pasture grasses, toward the brook-side. A tangle of birches and alders and catbrier fringed the limit here, and hid the brown, shallow water, across which a great scatter of white boulder-stones gave way for crossing to the pretty cedar woods that climbed the steep hill on the other side. France had seen them from the window of Miss Ammah's room, and she felt an irritated jealousy of Miss Ammah's monopoly. "I wonder if *she* thinks I'm not fit! Or if" — "she fancies it would n't do," were the words half shaped in her mind, and for which she gave herself, with a gasp, a mental clutch upon the throat. "An old woman can do anything! a young one can't get to be friends with — people — till — well, I suppose you can sympathize, any time; but there can't be much freshness in it!"

She did not know what freshness in Miss Ammah, at fifty-five, was answering at that moment to the words of the man of twenty-three, just finding himself out to be a man, with a man's need and hope in life, and not only his father's and mother's boy, good boy as he had been and meant to be.

"I shall keep on," he said. "I had no notion of taking my hand from the plough. Only, if you had thought my plan possible, — that I could in the course of a few years do both things. But I see; it would n't only be to pay off this, and clear the

farm. Father 'll be getting old, and mother must n't have to work so hard always. I must help them make the farm pay afterward. Miss Tredgold, it 's been a great lift, anyway, having you come here these summers. I would n't have missed it; but I suppose it 's like all lifts: it makes it harder to drop back, if you must drop."

"Why drop, Rael? No one ever need do that from any real lift."

Rael smiled gravely in the twilight.

"There 's a natural body, and there 's a spiritual body," he said. "It 's a wrench to have the inner man drawn up, and the outside fellow kept down by a contrary pull then."

Miss Tredgold did not instantly reply to that.

"I 've had Mr. Kingsworth," — Mr. Kingsworth was the rather unusual minister, and Israel's strong friend, — "and I 've had you. And this summer" — a long hesitancy here — "I 've realized more than ever that I could n't be quite as happy always, after knowing such people, if you were all to go away, and none such were ever to cross my road again. I 'm not feeling myself above my neighbors, Miss Tredgold; but I feel that there are folks above us all. And it 'll take a lot to satisfy me now, — to settle down amongst. — I shall have to — "

Still Miss Tredgold kept silence.

"I only meant," he resumed, tossing off his words now in a quick, careless way, as if they but illustrated the present conscious feeling, and had no present point or feeling of their own, "that some time I shall have to marry. Farmers all do. And a man ought n't to be able to think of any other possible woman as above his wife, you see."

"I see," Miss Tredgold answered slowly, and not instantly. "And that a man ought n't to be able to think of any shape of home and life that the woman he marries cannot help him make. Yes, I see all that. But it will be made straight, Rael; if you do the right thing, it can't lead anywhere but right. And there are two concerned, remember; God cares for that woman who *should* be your wife, wherever she is, as much as he cares for you."

"God bless her!" broke from Rael's lips impulsively, and he

put up his hand and slightly lifted his hat from his head. Miss Ammah's words, and the heart in them, brought him, for the moment, spirit to spirit as if face to face with that woman unknown. Yes, really unknown; for the woman he had seen this summer stood to his conscious thought as scarcely more than a revelation of possibility; yet the possibility had come close enough to make him pray that prayer.

They came up out of the shadow of the last group of elms, to the bar-place and to the roadway; they did not talk any more, and seemed to France, still watching from the window, quite prosily and stupidly trudging along on the opposite edgeways of the soft brown, deep-rutted road.

Miss Ammah was saying to herself, "It has been a perfect shame of me! blind, old, blundering ninny! but what shall I do now?"

Miss Ammah did that which was foreordained; she could not have done a cleverer thing, perhaps, if she had planned it. She carried a cold up with her from that lovely, sweet-smelling, treacherous brookside; she managed to put a fatigue on top of that within a day or two; and with all the rest, she kept on worrying and calling herself names. When Sunday came round, she made up her mind to "give up to it"; she set her room in perfect order, to the last small furnishing of dressing and washing table, put a fresh ruffled sacque and plaited cap on, measured out for herself two kinds of homœopathic medicines in two teacups with time-dial covers, placed them on her lightstand with her Bible and her eye-glasses and her "Christian Register" that had come the night before, — and lay down upon her bed, where she never moved from the first position she fell into for three whole hours.

"Resting," she told France, when France looked in and wondered; and shut her eyes in such determined, effigy-like stillness that the girl felt ordered to go away, and went. But by noon the languor had become a fever, and France went, frightened, to Mrs. Heybrook, and Mrs. Heybrook "took hold"; notwithstanding which prompt and capable assistance, the three hours' rest settled and prolonged itself into a three weeks' serious illness.

The first week, France was visible only in the kitchen when she came there to get the beef-tea that stood ready, or to prepare a gruel or a whey, or sitting solitary at her corner of the table in the dining-room, snatching a brief meal. Then came a night or two of anxious watching, when nobody really went to bed, except Lyman and the old farmer, when Sarell kept things hot in the kitchen, and Mrs. Heybrook "camped down" in France's bedroom, trying to take turns with France, who would not give up her turn at all, and Israel lay on the lounge in the best room below, with the doors all open, that "anybody might speak to him at any minute." And those nights France found, every two hours at least, the water-pitcher in the hallway at the stairhead changed for one fresh from the cold, delicious well, and twice each vigil some dainty bit of food newly placed in a dish beside it.

The second week, Rael began to bring field and forest delicacies: now a few far-fetched, late, north-side ripened strawberries; again, the earliest raspberries, sought, one by one almost, on the sunniest arches of vines sunniest-sheltered to the south; then a trout, just out of the water, whose delicate, pale-pink flesh came up from the broil like a bit of the breast of a tender little bird: and at France's table-corner, morning and evening, was always a dish of the fruit she was fondest of, — picked currants, the biggest and ripest from each cluster, full-juiced from the stems they had drunk through within five minutes.

The third week, they began to amuse and talk with Miss Ammah; and Rael came into the room, and read aloud various things that the minister, who called often to inquire, had lent him, or that Miss Ammah had been looking at and talking about with him before. And France sometimes sat downstairs in the broad back piazza hours together, while he was above there or Miss Ammah "rested" — sweet convalescent rest now — alone, with a hand-bell on the stand beside her, to touch if she wanted anybody, or sat in the great pillowed easy-chair, napping and waking alternately, with Mrs. Heybrook and her afternoon patchwork keeping her company in the opposite corner.

It was in this third week that France stumbled upon the Great Pyramid. She found it on the settee there one day, — Piazzi Smyth's wonderful book of "Our Inheritance." It had Bernard Kingsworth's name on the fly-leaf: of course, Rael Heybrook was reading it.

She turned it over wonderingly, trying to get an idea of it from its chapter-titles and grand Scripture prefixes. She read the preface, where the "parable in mathematical and physical science" is spoken of, and the "stones put together in vocal and meaning shapes," to be correctly read in the fulness of time, and "bear witness in the latter days." She looked curiously at the illustrations, the Great Pyramid "at the centre and border of the sector-shaped land," "Egypt in the geographical centre of the land-surface of the world," the plans of the circles of the heavens above the Great Pyramid, at the far-off epochs of antiquity, showing the places of the polar stars and the Pleiades and the equinox, as they could be only at vast recurrent cycles. She got vague hints of a tremendous thought at once sacred and scientific, wrapped in terms and demonstrations of a knowledge that she could not handle or interpret; and she opened where the leaves fell easily apart, at marvellous suggestions and applications of noble, universal standards of measure for line and weight and time, based upon solar distance and planet-density, making God's measures and man's measures identical in absolute truth; at proofs and prophecies of things that are and shall be; and at the figuring forth of the Great Pyramid waiting, silent, with all this word in it, — this "sign and witness unto the Lord of Hosts in the land of Egypt."

She was fond of mathematics and astronomy, — what she knew of them. She was fascinated by their grand general deductions always. She lost herself in these strange pages, which, if quite sure and true in what they put forth, should be as a revelation to the whole world; and she wondered that she came upon the book here in this farmhouse among the hills, lent out of the library of a country minister for the reading of a country youth, who drove his plough to field in the springtime, and toiled all day under the hot summer sun to gather hay into his father's gray old barns.

While she sat there, as gentle a picture as Lady Jane Grey may have been over her old Plato, — the look in her face of one illumined by a great sunrise toward which she turned new, wondering eyes, — Israel Heybrook came out from the sitting-room door, and stood in the other end of the piazza. She turned her head, graceful-modest with soft, simple lines of hair swept back over the temples and ears, and rolled together low behind. The high, stylish crown and puffs had disappeared during all these weeks of nursing. Somehow, in that small difference even, it had seemed as if a fence were down. Any way, she looked as a woman only can look when she is not "stylish," but purely and sweetly feminine.

"Do you understand all this?" she asked him.

He came and stood by her side. She moved along the old red settee, and he sat down in the place she made for him. So she turned the leaves over and back to passages that had struck her attention, or where marks were made, and she had studied over some paragraphs.

"See this," she said, "about the English farmer's 'quarters' for his wheat-measures, — that they are simply quarters of the capacity of the coffer in that 'king's chamber' in the heart of the pyramid that this man thinks was set there for a true measure for all people to deal with. And see this, about capacity-measure founding itself upon the whole bulk of the earth, taking a fraction of its diameter for unit, while line-measure takes a fraction of the radius, the line along which they measure between the centres of sphere and sphere! And see this about the Pleiades year, the great cycle counted out in the pyramid inches, a year to an inch, across these enormous diagonals! And see this, about the *lidless*, empty coffer: why, it makes you think of the stone rolled away from the tomb! And this, about Melchisedek being the builder of it all. And here at the end, the pyramid prophecy of the time coming, when people shall not suffer or go wrong any more under any sort of wrong ruling! Are these things really what is meant, and are they meant in earnest, and do you understand? Why! if there is such a book in the world, why does n't everybody know of it? And why are n't we all starting for Egypt, to

make the beginning of the new world-nation, the People of the Great Pyramid? And what *is* a pyramid inch?"

It was a thorough woman's rush of question, self-answering perception, impatient enthusiasm, and return to a very A, B, C of inquiry at the end.

Rael smiled his odd, grave smile, and answered her last query but one, — her grand demand. He spoke as simply as if it had been something about his farm or his harvest. "To the 'Hebrews of the Hebrews,' you know, Jerusalem is everywhere. Maybe that is why the pyramid is in the land-centre of the whole earth. It 's a sign for the whole of it."

Then they turned the book over together, and he showed her some of the links, the reasonings, the numbers, — the things she meant when she had asked him "did he understand," and then had broken forth with what she had perceived without understanding. He supplied to her elemental ignorance the pyramid-inch, the key to the mystical correspondence of the year-measure and sun-distance and earth-density, and so to the cosmic standards set forth for line and time and cubic contents of all things, when all things shall be compared in pure truth and righteousness.

"And so the standards themselves are signs!" she exclaimed ardently. "And the pyramid does tell of the whole truth coming; because weights and measures are n't so much, just for themselves. It 's the relation, the balance, the rule in everything that is sure to be worked out. Oh, I can't say it, but it is glorious! And the lidless coffer, the sarcophagus measure, is the measure of *a man;* that is, of a man raised up; that is, of an angel!"

At this moment the Reverend Bernard Kingsworth walked into the dooryard. He heard the last quick sentence, and his eyes lighted up; his whole face smiled, meeting that of the girl. When Bernard Kingsworth smiled, there was a wonderful shining.

What shall I do? He came, and they went on talking, catching as they could the light that fell upon these mighty ideas. I should like you to hear something of what they said, but you will tell me, as I have been told before, that I "sermonize,"

that people don't talk so every day. Granted; but there are days, and there are people, and there are such golden grains in all the falling sands of common days, if we will only pick them up; so that, for my part, I can no more tell a story of any real living and keep the word of life out of it than Mr. Dick could keep Charles the First's head out of his memorial. So that, in consequence, they who care for my memorial must take the head with it, and maybe learn how it fits in, — in the influence and history of things.

They talked, then, of the world measures; of these densities and distances and motions, so exact, so related; of the measures in the making of everything; of how the measures *are* the making — in music, in chemistry, in every art and science; of the literal steps in creation, the ladder in the planet itself that geologists sound and climb by; the silurian, the sandstone, the chalk *measures;* of the steps to an end that men can call by no other significant name, — legal measures, political measures, measures of prudence, of safety, of attainment, of understanding.

"True measure is true everything," Mr. Kingsworth said. "It is the very law of God. And so he puts his law into the least of men's acts and dealings, that, learning and living it there, they may climb up to all knowledges and affections; faithful in the least, the mere wheat measures, they shall come to live and rule among the greatest; to handle divine causes, to take from God's hand and build by his will, He building by them and in them the glory that is to be revealed. That is the promise of the pyramid, written in stone. At the heart of it is man's truth with his neighbor, the one fair measure for all with all. The whole of it tells the secrets of the stars."

"There is another kind of measure," said France thoughtfully, "the measure that the world seems most in a tangle about. There will have to be a great pyramid measure of things and people, — what they are worth in real comparisons. Those measures are all upside down, I think."

"I think you touched that in what I heard you say as I came up, Miss Everidge," said the minister. "The measure of a man, — a man raised up; that is, of an angel. The spiritual measure is the measure of a man, and of the things of a man. There is no other."

"And people never go by it, at least against the things that stand in sight."

"Because man has made false signs, false values, and has let them stand for him. 'God sent a man with a measuring line in his hand' 'to measure Jerusalem' in the sight of the prophet. And he sent a message by another angel after him, 'Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon!'"

"There will have to be a great giving up, such as people will never agree to make, before it can be set right," said France.

"Perhaps there is where the chief mistake is," returned Mr. Kingsworth. "A great deal of giving up has been preached where *giving place* might have been truer. I must go back to Ezekiel again. He saw in the vision a Man whose appearance was as of brass; he stood in the gate of a house, and he measured all the building with the reed in his hand. All the little chambers and doorways and arches and pillars, and every *least part* was in its place in the proportion of his measuring reed; and the Great Gate looked toward the East, where the glory of God came in; and at the end he said, 'Show the house to the House of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. This is the law of the house; upon the top of the mountain the *whole limit* thereof shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.' We do see persons here and there, I think, Miss Everidge, who measure life and things and people by the pyramid inch and cubit."

"I thought of that," said Israel, "when I came across Miss Tredgold's name here in the Book of the Pyramid."

"Miss Ammah's!" France exclaimed, surprised.

"Yes, exactly," Rael answered, turning the leaves. "And I found the rest of it in the dictionary. 'Ammah' is 'the first, the foundation, the mother measure'; and in the dictionary 'Ammah' is 'abbess, or spiritual mother.'"

"Well," remarked France consideringly, "I should think Miss Ammah *is* a pyramid-inch woman. She does go for realities, and reckons by foundation rules. But for an abbess, a spiritual mother, — I don't think she is particularly sanctified."

"Have n't we just been finding out that righteous inches

make the whole righteous stature and structure?" asked the minister, smiling. "I don't doubt much about Miss Ammah's sanctification. Would she be able to see me, do you think, this afternoon?"

France went up to ask. The minister and Rael Heybrook exchanged a word or two about her while she was gone. When she came back and invited Mr. Kingsworth to go up stairs with her, Rael stood still a minute, alone, and then went off to his milking. He was thinking — with two brown pails swinging from his two brown hands — of spiritual statures; and something occurred to him that was like a swift measuring of these statures in the man and the woman who had just left him, — that as a man and a woman should be in height and fair proportion to each other, Bernard Kingsworth and Frances Everidge were.

Frances Everidge, in her northwest room, looking from her roof-window over the piazza, saw Rael with his milk-pails as he walked with head bent slightly down. She was half impatient of the other man, sitting there in the room beyond, in his nice clerical black, free to follow the profession he chose, free to study out the thoughts that attracted him. She was half jealous that, with more prepared and perfect speech, he had even helped her just now to understand those splendid things. How modestly Rael Heybrook had given way to him! Yet how clearly the young farmer had shown her, just before, about the pyramid-inch and the squared circle and the twenty-five-inch cubit!

"He wants to be an engineer," she was thinking to herself, while she watched the bent-down head and the old straw hat vanished from her clairvoyance, "and he almost got to it. Well, he is one, if he does carry milk-pails. And I think engineering is the noblest thing in the world. It 's the power the world was made by. If the man-measure was only just set right, — well, then I suppose we should measure even milk-pails differently."

CHAPTER XI.

BRACKETS AND INTERLINES.

THERE came down a letter within a week after to Princeton, where Mrs. Everidge and the little ones were staying; which, after reading, the mother sent, as family correspondence was accustomed to go around, to her elder girls at Magnolia and Mount Desert. At the bottom of the last written page, she put, in pencil, a "?". It went from Helen to Euphemia with a "!", beneath the interrogation. But Euphemia, fast growing to be the wise woman of the family, sent it back to her mother with this — "[ ]" — below them both. Now the reader shall have the much-annotated epistle, and make her own pointings upon it, or fill the brackets, as only readers can.

"MY DEAR MAMMA, — Miss Ammah is gaining splendidly. She has been twice to drive, and she has her hammock and her easy-chair upon the piazza now, and spends nearly all the day there. Do you know, I have found out what her very odd name means in the Hebrew? It is an 'original measure,' the 'mother-measure' of things. Is n't that true of Miss Ammah's judgments? It is in a very curious book that they have here, and that I am reading now; trying to read, I ought to say, for it is making great pretension to say just 'reading it,' as if it were any ordinary book, and I could 'riddle it all out,' as Sarell says, as fast as I can spell the words. Mr. Kingsworth, the minister, whose 'Jerusalem sermon' I told you about, lent it to Israel Heybrook, the farmer's son. It seems queer that a farmer's son should go into such things; but he was beginning to be an engineer, and had to come back to help work out a debt on the farm. Mr. Kingsworth has explained some of it beautifully to us. He is very kind; he often calls

to see Miss Ammah, who knew him in Northampton, when he preached there. But I have n't told you what the book is. I hope they 'll put it into the club, for our readings next winter, if we can only catch some mathematical professor to explain the calculations, and anybody the least bit able to tell the meanings as Mr. Kingsworth can. It 's perfectly wonderful; it would turn the world upside-down — I mean right-side up — if everybody could really and truly get hold of it. It 's a whole Bible in stone; 'a revelation in the only language that never has to be translated,' Mr. Kingsworth says. It is called 'Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid'; but, of course, I can't *begin* to tell you about it, only, every line and every measure and every bit of proportion in it, and its place on the globe, and its pointings to the stars, are true to some wonderful exactness of a fact, and that fact is true to everything under the sun; and everything under the sun has got to be put in proportion to it some time or other, down to the milk-measures and the pound-weights. And when everything is weighed and measured right, *inside* and *out*, and put where it belongs, great-pyramid fashion, the millennium will have come. Mr. Kingsworth preached another grand sermon about it, from 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.'

O mamma, you ought all to come some time to Fellaiden. I don't half dare to put it in your heads, for I feel as if we should have no right to come rushing in here upon Miss Ammah's preemption; but if you ever did come, you would want to come again, and to keep coming, and to keep staying. It is better than the White Mountains, because these mountains are so green and lovely to their very tops, and one does n't put all the others out, as the White Hills do. You can look off among them and down among them, and the mists and the rains and the sunset colors go spilling and floating about in the valleys and hollows of them, and they are just *singing* with cascades when everything else is still. The Sundays are too exquisite for anything. I told you about the ride to the Centre, and how the Centre looks, just under the ridges of a great hill-circle, at this edge of it. Have I ever told you about the acre of maidenhair? I have pressed *heaps* of it; a pile, between papers, a

yard high, up in the garret, with a board and four stones upon it to keep it down. And Israel Heybrook has brought some of the loveliest spleen-worts for us, from some way-off, rocky, brooky places where the farm goes, — dwarf and silvery spleen-worts; I don't think the girls have ever had any like them. The lilies are blossoming now in the ponds; we have a bowlful on a stand here on the piazza. And there is a place quite near, where they say it will be blue with gentians; and in another month or two, the maples will begin to turn, and then I am sure this Heybrook farm will be like some kind of a Sinbad or Aladdin country, with hills of precious stones and avenues of ruby and topaz columns. The very cow-lane is planted with sugar-maples, — a superb shade of a quarter of a mile, from the barns to the edges of the pine-woods.

"I *should* like to see all this in snow and ice, and to sleigh-ride up and down these pitches!

"I would write you about the family, if I thought I could make you know them so. Helen would have to find something besides 'upper and under and middling,' to class such people by. If *our* upper kind are on one height, these are on a height of their own. They are not 'educated,' at all, except the boys; but they are pretty well 'brought out' by their living among these free, fresh things; and the boys are brought out both ways. I think, mamma, we are apt to respect the things most people *have*, — their place or their money, or their good manners or their learning; but I certainly do respect these Heybrooks themselves.

"Miss Ammah thinks she shall stay until October.

"Love to papa and the little ones, to you all. I am glad you are all having such good times of your own. I should be just flying with fidgets to have mine without you, if you were n't.

"Your loving daughter,

"France."

It was certainly pretty well for general cheerfulness and fulness of accounting for it, considering the three weeks' illness and watch just over. But it *was* over, and that always makes people glad; also, that had been told in the time of it, when

sickness and health bulletins were all that could be dispatched. Now the flowers and the ferns, and the maples and the mountains, crowded in.

France looked it over before she sent it off. She could n't help finding herself out just a little. She was conscious there were some things bracketed out. "But of course I could n't put everything into eight pages, even," she said to herself. I think it hardly entered her head to begin at once, in such necessarily slight and casual representation of things, upon pyramid-inch and proportion.

Perhaps, if any but a Boston girl had written all that about the pyramid and the millennium, there would have been a family *de lunatico* to sit upon her. But the *inquirendo* here was as to the country minister, and what Miss Tredgold could be about — now that she *was* about — to let the affair — no, the possibility of an affair — go on; no, not that, either, but even distantly threaten to begin.

So Miss Tredgold received a letter presently, written with invisible interlines, wherein, under merest friendlinesses and words of very gracious course, — little news of the other girls, and far-off sketching of winter plans, — there ran a tone of hint and caution: "France is apt to go so furiously after one thing; don't let her study too deep into the mathematics and archæology she seems to have got hold of. I don't want those headaches to come back again." And, "I am so glad you are able for drives and little excursions again. France tells me of lovely views and places that you so enjoy. I am thankful for her, too, I am sure. I don't know what would become of her if she were shut up by your being shut up; and of course she must depend upon you, as there seems to be no very suitable way for her to get about much without you." Quite far on from that, mixed up with a quantity of mere mention, came, "I hope France does n't bother that kind Mr. Kingwood too much. What a remarkable person he seems to be for such a perfectly out-of-the-way little parish! And that reminds me, — would n't you both like to have some parcels of books from Loring's? They come up here; we exchange them once a fortnight by the express. I suppose you get the 'Atlantic' and the 'Transcript' regularly?"

And the postscript was, "Do you really think you shall stay so late as into October? I shall be back for the little ones' school by the fifteenth of September, perhaps earlier."

"Why don't she say right out, 'Keep the girl out of that minister's way, and don't let her ride round with the farmer's sons'?" said Miss Ammah, who could n't stand being dictated to, and who, if such a word had come, would have packed France off to Princeton by the next coach and train, although she knew there was no room for her there, and it would be an utter break with France and her family. But she liked the girl, and she could ignore the hints; so she only had it out with herself in a sharp soliloquy, which she ended with a laugh. "Perhaps if she knew of the Kingsworths of Montreal," she said, "and that old General Kingsworth, the uncle, was worth his half million, and only this namesake-nephew and a niece to leave it to, she'd scruple less about the 'bother,' and might make out to remember his name right." Here the laugh came out loud, and France heard it in the next room, and asked what it was about, of course; for in this curious world nobody can ever laugh, any more than they can shriek, without accounting for it. And the pyramid-inch woman only said, looking out of the window for an escape, "The old gray cropple-crown has coaxed one of the buff hen's chickens over the fence again, and Mrs. Buff has flown after her, and pulled the best feather right out of her cap. She looks awfully meek without it. It 's dreadful to be a disappointed old cropple-crown, and to have to go about borrowing other hens' chickens!"

But if she spoke in parables made to her hand for wisdom's sake, she talked straight enough to herself, without any parable at all.

"I wonder what the girl has written to set them out? And I wonder how far I *am* responsible?" she asked inwardly. "Am I to go right away with the child, because here is a man in a black coat and another in his shirt-sleeves, who may, either one of them, get the worst of it? for I don't believe France will, any way. But, then, how could I tell what might happen on the very journey? There are all sorts of railroad accidents. No; I'm on my own straight course, and everybody else is on

theirs; she's here with me, with advice and consent, and the rest belongs to Providence, and the steering of those whom it concerns. It's part of the history of France, too; and France is old enough to take care of her own politics. I've no right to stave off any of her experience. If I thought Rael would suffer, — that's what *did* trouble me, but here steps in the minister to cure him. Rael's giving way already; and Rael is n't a fool, to give up his own, even his own in his own heart, if he knew it. His own may be on the road: France Everidge is just showing him that it is n't here, among these Fellaiden girls. If France *should* take the minister, — I mean if Bernard Kingsworth *would* take her, — I know how *that* would be reconciled fast enough. And if it was written, beyond my foresight and without my planning, that the other could possibly be, why, it would be the Lord's doing, and it would n't be so marvellous in my eyes that I could n't fall in with it. No," she added, as if by a suggestion that reached farther, "nor be an accessory after the fact, if Providence signified that it wanted me. I don't owe an atom of accountability to any scare of worldly calculation *against* Providence. And yet, it does make an old cropple-crown feel fussy to get another hen's chicken over the fence, and then see it running under the brambles."

With such reasoning and the present necessity, Miss Ammah quieted herself, and the history of France went on.

France had found herself out just thus far: that the many speculations she was conscious of concerning this anomalous young farmer-gentleman — for it was the question of the reconcilability of such a term that kept coming up to her — were not at all submitted, or allowed their relative place, in what she had written home of the Fellaiden people. Still, it was only one of the sort of puzzles that always had puzzled her, and that at home they never entered into the least bit; on the contrary, they would be sure to "think things that had no sense in them" if she mentioned it. What the precise things without sense were, in her mind, she did not stop to sound for; she only said sturdily, "Of course, it's nothing to *me*, anyway; but I *should* like to understand a little better the queer world I've been born into."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RED QUARRIES.

Miss Ammah grew quite strong. The great three weeks' haying was just over: there was a lull in farm-work and house-work. Miss Ammah wanted to get over to Reade, fifteen miles, to have a dentist there do some slight mending for her teeth. Mrs. Heybrook also wanted to go, to "trade a little" at the shops. To be sure, she could send for her calicoes by Mrs. Clark, who would be going over Monday, and so save her own time; and Rael could just drive Miss Ammah in the buggy; but Sarell said with force, "You *know* Miss Clark hain't got no sort of judgment and she ain't the most reliable woman in the world, any way, nor in the town either! I won't trust her with *my* arrants!"

Besides, the "Red Quarries" were on the way; and Miss France wanted to see the Red Quarries, where they found the pink tourmaline and the rose-quartz. So all these things and the pleasant weather settled it. Rael was to drive the two horses in the double-seated wagon, and Miss Ammah and his mother and Miss France were to go.

They started early, when the dew was still bright in the shady places, and the sweet pasture-perfumes were just rising up in the sunny ones. The glory of the blue overhead was only flecked by softest silvery foam of clouds that floated joyously upon the high-moving mountain airs. Everything was as clean and beautiful and glad as life was with the two freshest of heart and years among them. The big, plain mountain-wagon, with its red wheels, its hard seat-back, softened with rugs and robes flung over, rumbled along jollily after the sure-stepping, comfortable old horses. France sat in front with Rael. The long summer day, of which this beauty was the

beginning, was before them. The luncheon-baskets, packed with the best "victuals" from Mother Heybrook's pantry, were under the box. They were to stop at the Quarries, a mile this side the edge of Reade, get their stones, and eat their dinner; for the dinners at the Reade taverns were what Mrs. Heybrook, with her housewifely ability that was opposite inability, called "unaccountable."

When we all know what summer days do, — what pleasure shared is to young creatures making up their vision of life from the fairest that life presents; when we remember the town pleasures, — the hops, the assemblies, the concerts, the Germans, that bring young folks together, and what the beginning of one of these evenings is to the youths and maidens who meet with gloves just drawn on, flowers fresh in the hand, and the band-music sounding its first notes in their ears, — can't we think what, in the same nature of things, this all-day, world-wide ecstasy was, as it began with France Everidge and Rael Heybrook? They could n't have been young man and young girl, and not have felt some thrill of it, different from what it would have been without each other. Something of comparison with those hothouse pleasures of the winter and society-time was suggesting itself to France; and she thought eagerly, "Oh, what bigger things there are than little lighted rooms and a few florist's bouquets and exactly eight pieces of music with set strings! and how much bigger *people* seem, let loose with all this to make their work or pleasure in!" She turned around on her seat, and said to Miss Ammah, "I 'm afraid I can never crowd a real good time inside brick walls again, now that I 've had all creation for one single treat!" And Israel, holding the reins loosely over his knee as his big horses grappled up the Centre Hill, smiled that the grand divertisement was just a country ride that he could give anybody, any time, always, — when the great hay-harvest was not actually amaking. They went by the river road, down through the wild, black glen, from which the cedar-clad heights rose straight and steep at either side, along the ledge-winding, whence they looked over into the shine and foam of noisy little cataracts, across broad meadow-stretches, where the blossoms of the arrowhead sheeted as with snow the beau-

tiful level; and here Rael put the reins into France's hands, sprang down, and over the low, broken wall, gathered handfuls of the delicate flowers with their spear-pointed leaves, and came back and heaped them all into the girl's lap. That was n't a thing that could be done in any "German figure" or in any drawing-room.

The pleasure brimmed up and up. The high noon found them in the cool, deep ledges where the quarry road began. They came around under the flank of a mighty hill, crossed into a low defile, scrambled up a cart-track over rattling stones, brook-washed by the spring currents; and in a cheerful opening, where oaks and maples made a marginal ring, they stopped the horses, climbed down from the wagon, made their little camping-place, and forgot that they were bound any whither from any where, or ever back again, and that this lovely stillness was not the very emptiness of all the world of everything but joy and beauty, and themselves its sole delighters.

Away up in the hills, in these gray and green solitudes, everything is everybody's, — everybody's who knows where it is and what it means when they come to it. Of course, you can't quarry in a man's owned and titled ledges, or cut his woods down; but "all creation for a treat," from the huckleberries on the bushes and the fair, odorous azaleas in the wild, dark swamps, to the crystals of garnet and amethyst that you may pick up among the clefts of granite, and the glory of all the unforbidden range of earth and sky, belongs to these farmer people, whose hearts and souls sometimes grow great and sweet toward such fulness, though shut out and cut off from the borrowed culture of the towns. Rael Heybrook was a prince to-day, showing his inheritance — the things he had had essential ownership in from boyhood — to these his guests, — to France Everidge, her face radiant with the joy that beat through her veins like new blood, her step springing with eagerness as she followed him on and on, greedy to gather in to-day all this big mountain and its splendors, for sight and memory at least, to carry away with her, and keep a "joy forever."

Miss Ammah began to quiver in her conscience again, sitting

there in enforced rest with Mother Heybrook among the maples; but this day, at any rate, was beyond her snatching back again.

In the low brushwood under the hill they found the lovely rosy azalea, late-blooming in a cool, rock-shaded hiding-place, and the fair, white, spicy blossoms of the commoner kind. They filled their emptied lunch-baskets with them, packing their stems in dripping mosses. Then they addressed themselves to the search for jewels. It was like a fairy tale.

Up rose the high cone of the bristling, scrub-wooded hill, veined mightily with its one broad heaving line of outcropped granite, like a lava stream. Up this they had to climb, to cross the crest, to clamber down beyond into the open quarries, where the gray seams with their white flashes, and the wide-strewn heaps of quartz and feldspar fragments, with glistening films and solid plates of mica catching the sun's rain of light and flinging it back in piercing, scintillant intensity, lay like one great mountain geode broken apart before them.

They found their red tourmaline, their bits of garnet, sheets of violet-colored mica, above all the rosy masses of mother-rock and the clear white obelisks of crystal, that grouped themselves like little fallen pillars, a miniature primeval ruin. France came back with her gown full, the overskirt gathered up across her arm, with a weight that threatened to break through the stuff, wild with delight, and calling to Miss Ammah that Mr. Rael had as many as he could carry in her shawl for her, Miss Ammah's self. "They 'll fill a whole cabinet," she said. "Why, you don't know! You can't conceive! We 've been to an actual Golconda!"

"Well," said Miss Ammah a little bit tartly, as she rose rather stiffly from her long low posture, "I think now we 'd better go to Reade."

She had half a mind to say she wanted to ride in front herself now, above the horses; but that would have been ridiculous. They knew so altogether better about her usual mind in regard to horses, and that her only peace was to sit behind, forgetting the eight legs, and merely watching placidly the four involuntary wheels. Just as they were going into Reade, besides! No,

this day, in all its circumstance, was beyond her snatching back again. Poor Miss Ammah, — who had given things over confidently to Providence and the parties concerned! She did not yet know what this day was to do that could not in a hurry be snatched back or got away with into safer days.

It was the first time Rael and France had been so thrown together. If the minister had been there, as he had been in their pyramid readings, their star-gazing in the warm, bright evenings, going out and in between the planisphere under the parlor lamp and the round of heaven all visible from the ridge of silent roadway out before the door! Both together, she felt no dread of them; one at a time, and this one, it began first to look momentous.

To Rael and France nothing that they knew had altered. They had not talked very much, they had been so busy and so happy. He had thought once and again, seeing her pleasure, her bright looks, her quick movements, "How simple and how glad she is!" and France had set down a fresh item in the slow estimate she fancied she was making of him, simply as that farmer-gentleman she must account for to allow. "He is as fond of beautiful things as if he had to buy them, instead of finding them in the rocks and woods. I wonder if that is n't something gentle-born?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW MUCH MORE DOES IT TAKE ?

It was in the evening, the sweet dusk-edge, as they drove slowly back from Reade.

They had taken the long river road in the morning, eighteen miles by the way of the north-side quarries. They were coming home by the cross-road now.

They had got to the crown of hills above "Jerusalem," and were descending, with careful reining in and bearing back, the steep, long plunges, — for these mountain roads are like cataract beds, and travellers are like the falling water, — where the only break and safety were the water-bars, humping up across the way at frequent intervals.

Midway down, — a crack, a lurch, — a sudden huddling of harness, wagon, horses.

They did not know till afterward what happened, or how they got safe out of it. There was only that quick consciousness of the instant upon which people act half blindly, yet oftentimes as from a preternatural clear-seeing.

Something had given way ; they were all in a loose, clattering heap : there was the second's pause before the inevitable rush, and the terrible remainder of the hill was before them. Rael, with a brave shout to his horses, was out over the dashboard, lighting on the heavy pole between their struggling haunches, the reins still gathered in his hands. The iron-hooked end of the pole struck fast against the water-bar, burying itself in the hard earth ; that held them back an instant. The wise beasts, feeling their master and his manhood down there with them in their very work and peril, and recognizing the beginning of the help, held their own nobly for an instant more. In the self-same flashes of time the three women had been out at back and

sides, France over the high forward step with one quick spring. Then the girl had seized up a great stone, and crowded it chock against the grinding, slipping wheel, — another, two more then; the elder women seeing what was to do and hurrying to help with it. Nobody spoke a word till all was fast.

Rael unhitched his horses: some strap or staple had given way and parted the neckyoke from the pole; it was only his quick spring upon the tongue that had checked the downward plunge, and hung their safety on the bit of timber and his hundred and sixty pounds of weight. France, sitting there on the rough roadside bank, watching what he was doing now, and asking nothing, understood it all. He was tying the yoke with a bit of rope, winding it fast about the pole, that fortunately was not broken. He stood between the horses' heads, quietly intent upon his work; Mrs. Heybrook and Miss Tredgold were dusting each other's gowns. France said to herself, remembering the leap down among those scrambling hoofs, before the threatening crush of the wheels, "He is as brave as a lion! How much more does it take, I wonder?"

Wise with man's beginning wisdom, and growing wiser; gentle as a woman with care and tendance; beauty-loving as a child; quick and strong, and full of courage, not counting his life, or his life's plan, dear unto him against the need of others. How much more, indeed? How much more did she know anybody to be?

But he had grown up out of the ground; had come up like a turnip, with the soil clinging to him.

Did she say that to herself? Not at all; it was said as if behind her. She had now to reason, not with herself, who had always run counter, in a girlish fashion, to the prejudices of her class and narrow circle, — or rather of the class and narrow circle which stands censor to the imagination of a wider class seeking to press within a smaller limit; she had to reason with what, in spite of herself, stood censor over her now, from habit of appeal, of control, of very resistance. And all in behalf, quite objectively, of this instance, this fact of human nature, and a special condition, which was to be fairly measured and then maintained.

Grown? come up? Had he quite done that? was he half, yet, of what he would be, must be, before he could be measured? was he not — the disputed word came back to her — merely middling, as yet? If this were half height, what was the full stature? was it anything she had known much of, except in story-dreams? Was it any gentleman's measure that she had come close enough to, in her small, school-girl, party-going experience, to look up at? A great many gentlemen's measures were simply kept at their tailors'. It was the measure of something she knew of in men who spoke and acted for their kind. Gentlemen, not of mere order or family, but nobles of a race. Meanwhile this noble had mended his tackle in such fashion as he could.

Miss Tredgold was demoralized, and could not be assured that the mending would hold, or if it did, that the old wagon's time had not come and it would not go to pieces, bit by bit, between here and the farm, down all those awful barn-roof pitches. Insanely, though quietly, she declared an intention of walking. Two miles and a half of barn-roof pitches, and she the very one of the party who could not do two miles and a half of fair walking.

Rael offered to lead the horses, and so lighten the weight, besides keeping control. She would rather not. The only way, then, was to start on in company with her, and take her up when her muscles gave out and her nerves gave in. France would walk with her, and Mother Heybrook and Rael would ride.

But at that instant it was found out that France could not walk. She had sat still on the bank, not mentioning what she had thought would go off of itself, — a little pain in her knee from her jump. Apparently, it had gone off by resting; but when she rose to her feet she dropped back again with a slight cry. There was a twist; she could not bear her weight. She laughed, her brows knit at the same time with the aching.

They all started toward her. Rael came to her first. "You are hurt," he said; "and you saved us from the whole danger. Is it very bad?"

"I? how can you tell such a — contortion? Do you suppose

we shall ever forget seeing you go down there into that great heap of hunching, scrambling creatures?" she spoke in the safe, dignified plural, though nobody had seen him at all but herself, until it was pretty well over. "You might have been dragged away, — run over, — crushed."

"Yes, if you had not blocked the wheels," said Rael quietly. "Is it very bad?"

"What is it, France?" asked Miss Ammah. "Can't you get up? What shall we do?"

Rael saw what; and he did it, just as he had jumped down between the horses. He put forth two strong arms, gathered France and her draperies all up, folding her shawl about her, as lightly and easily as a nurse gathers up a baby; and holding her so, went up step and thill and footboard, as a nurse might climb an even stair. He set her down softly, where she had sat before; then with two baskets, a cushion from his side of the wagon-seat, and a rug from the back, he made a level with the dashboard; took her two little feet, not asking which was the lame one, and rested them both across it; rolled a cloak up in the corner for her to lean against; then he said, "Now, mother, — now, Miss Ammah, — we must get home."

And with that, up drove the minister, in his light buggy, from a bit of cross-road that came in just ahead.

There was room for one with him: Miss Ammah had better go; she would not be afraid, and she would get home first, and the large load would be lightened. She need not worry about Miss France: Rael would walk down all the pitches, and lead the horses.

There was no taking France down again; there was no use making any more fuss. Miss Ammah felt the hands of Providence grasping her on every side, and gave way, mentally washing her own. Mentally, underneath all her scruples, repeating to herself, "If they *are* man and woman enough to find each other out, all Boston could n't help it if it was here. And perhaps I 'm more accountable to what I know about them both as man and woman than I am to what all Boston would think about them, not knowing at all. If I could n't in conscience be toward, I could n't in nature be from-ward — that 's froward,

— in it; especially when I 'm set right outside it all, as I am this minute. Besides which, here 's the other."

The other was breaking up the thread of her self-examination by persistent inquiries, — about the accident, about the hurt Miss Everidge had sustained, about anything he could possibly do for them all. Doctor Fargood? He would drive over to the railway village and fetch him, with pleasure. Would n't it be well to go right on, when he should have left her at the farm? The doctor would be back almost as soon as Miss Everidge would have arrived herself. And with that he whipped up his little Morgan at the brow of a descent, so that Miss Tredgold screamed in a whisper, as was always her discreet way in her driving frights, and besought him to hold back.

They would wait and see. It might be nothing. Arnica would be the first thing, any way. There could be nothing very serious, or she could not have rushed round blocking the wheels, when she first jumped off.

"Did she do that? It was great presence ofmind."

"It was great presence of stones, anyway. And it was natural enough to put them to their obvious use," Miss Tredgold answered serenely; for the Morgan was going comfortably on a safer level now, and a suspension of terror always made her slightly jocose.

Mr. Kingsworth was reconciled to waiting at the farm a little while to see.

But it was Israel Heybrook who lifted her down, as he had lifted her up, and carried her in his arms straight up the stairs, and laid her on the sofa in Miss Ammah's room, and there delivered her over to that lady. He scarcely questioned, or expressed much of concern: by his quietness he showed the respectful distance that he felt, even holding her that way, through necessity, in his very arms; and he did not think of crossing the threshold with her into her own apartment.

But he went down stairs and led his team around to the barns, feeling as if some great, new thing had happened to him, and he did not dare to look at it to see what it was.

In the kitchen, Sarell, in her peculiar way, was approaching a fresh subject with Mrs. Heybrook. "Things alwers happens

all of a heap," she said; "and I don' know whether I 'd best tell yer or not. Here 's France goin' to be laid up lame, an' waited on (Sarell was too much born in the American purple to miss any of her own dignity by 'Missing' anybody else whom she ever heard spoken of without a nominal prefix); and here 's Tryphosy Clark ben after you, as she alwers doos when she comes to a jog, or thinks she doos; and I s'pose likely she 'll expect word from yer somehow, if yer can't go. I hope the' ain't goin' to be fever round. Miss Tredgold 's jest got through, an' now here 's 'Lando Clark. Tryphosy said there warn't nothin' to be scared of, an' that 's how I know. I know Tryphosy. I presume the doctor told her right out 't was typ'us."

"Can't you ever think well of Tryphosy again, Sarell? Life 's too short for querrellin' and suspectin'," said Mrs. Heybrook, reaching down hat and shawl that she had just hung up in the press. "If Orlando 's sick, I must step down. I s'pose you can help up stairs, if they want anything; I 'll run up and find out. And you can see to the tea."

"I know life 's too short fer querrellin'," Sarell responded, her fresh face, with its sunshine of blue-sparkling, good-natured eyes, its beaminess of red-gold, wavy hair, and complexion suiting, its mouth, untaught as yet to drop its corners, in curious contradiction to the humor of her speech. "But it 's too short, too, fer makin' *over* some folks. An' yer could n't make up with Tryphosy Clark athout ye could make her over. She 's right there, same 's she ever was, an' will be t' the end o' the chapter. And that means she ain't anywheres ter be depended on. She 'll melt over last year's sugar an' sell it fer ne-ew, an' she 'll give short weight of butter an' cheese, an' she 'll borrer big and return small, an' she 'll lie the charickter all out o' the house, finally, as she 's lied away Silas Clark's good name aready, with her contraptions. He 's a clever-disposed kind 'ver man, nat'rilly, ef he could only git shet o' her tricks; an' he 's ben a ri'down good husbin' to her; that *is*, as good 's a man knows *how* to be. Yiss, I kin see ter tea an' clear away; but I can't reconcile it, your goin' down there. It 'll run all through the family, — everything alwers doos run through that family, — an' it 'll start on yourn; fer you 'll be down yerself."

"Don't borrow trouble, Sarell," Mrs. Heybrook said placidly moving toward the stairs.

"Why not?" Sarell called after her, in a brisk and cheerful manner. "There'll be plenty to pay back with, ef we all liv''n prosper!" Then she turned to her waiting work again; put a handful of chips into the stove, set the tea-pot and the griddle back, and gave a fresh whip-up to the bowl of flapjack batter.

She had spoken her mind: that always cheered her up in the very process, so that the last end of a tirade or a lamentation became quite genial or jolly. Also, she never projected her grievances into surroundings that had nothing to do with them; she never slammed innocent doors or dealt recklessly with irrelevant crockery; she never gloomed at the next person because the last one had worried her. "There ain't no need to cut your bread with a knife you've jest ben peelin' onions with." That was her idea, and she stood up to it.

CHAPTER XIV.

MOUNTAIN-FOGS AND CLEAR-RUNNING WATERS.

WELL, and the history of France?

In the days that followed the laming of her knee, it was a history of the interior mostly. Foreign relations were *in statu quo*. For ten days she was keeping her room; she could not walk over the stairs, and, of course, she would not now be carried. The doctor had prescribed a three weeks' rest, as nearly entire as might be; the ten days' perfect passivity he had insisted on: after the three weeks he promised her activity again. She read; she painted some flowers and ferns; she sewed and crocheted a little; she thought a great deal. Never a word she said about her coming home that night, or Rael Heybrook's service in it. She had taken it at the time in utter passivity and almost utter silence. Twice she had said the decent "Thank you"; the second time it was "Thank you very much": she could not say less. But it was spoken with perfect quietness; she would not for worlds have seemed embarrassed about it, or treated it as a thing in itself for particular feeling or notice. She would by no means have resented it; it was the only thing to be done; and if not resentment, what other imaginable emotion could it have provoked in her? Could? That was the question in the tone she chose to take, even with herself; but in spite of her tone, there was another more searching: what *had* it?

The war was brought home, now; it was no longer an argument for an opinion against the standards of the world: it was a struggle within herself. It exasperated her, because, according to her theories, there had no business to be a struggle at all. If this man were a gentleman, why not, with a womanly shyness, yet with a womanly truth, own to herself that those

moments of dependence upon his strength, his promptitude, his delicate, bold chivalry of help, had been moments to her of a secret, beautiful joy, — joy, that for a woman there was in the world this manly power and kindness; joy, that to this woman, herself, this manly man should render it? She was angry, ashamed; she was furious, disgusted with herself: but she could not deny it. She only would not look at it. She beat her own thought down, smiting it in the face.

And all this, while she placidly waited and passed her time in little feminine resources, seeming to miss nothing, to be impatient for nothing, to remember nothing. Miss Ammah laughed at herself in these days, for her anxieties of the weeks ago.

Mrs. Heybrook would wait on the young lady; she would leave her ironing, her baking, her butter-working, to bring her letters from the morning mail, a book that Mr. Kingsworth had left, a plateful of fresh, crisp caraway-cakes, a glass of cold yellow buttermilk from the iced churn. Miss Ammah begged her not; she insisted on carrying up the trays herself for regular meals; but there was always just this thing that the good woman "thought she might as well step right up with." She was also stepping down to the Clarks'.

There *was* fever there: Orlando was tediously, though not dangerously ill; then Emily was down with it, and badly. Tryphosy Clark was no nurse; she was only a rub-and-go housekeeper; she never had things handy, or thought of them if they were at hand. Mother Heybrook was everything and had everything; there is always one such woman in a country neighborhood, upon whom the neighborhood hangs.

"Mother" began to look pale. The hot days, — on her feet from four in the morning; the short, half-resting nights, at last some nights of watching, when Emily Clark died; then the funeral, for which she had to put her shoulder to the wheel, to straighten the house, after she had straightened the corpse in it, — these, one after and upon the other, wore upon her. "Father" saw it; but all he could do was to keep the mare tackled up, so as to "slip her down to Clarks' as well as not," and slip down after her when she was ready to come home; to look, mildly anxious, in her white face, and say,

"Don't go too fur, mother; take care of yourself"; or, "Too bad, mother; all beat out, I know." "But it was no use to contradict; marm was a pretty resolute kind of a woman."

Israel noticed it; and he got the milk strained and set away, while Sarell washed tea-things and scalded pails, so that the willing girl's hands were in the bread-trough before "mother" came back from her neighborly kindness, the nights she did come back; and there was nothing further left for even her scrupulousness to "see to." Rael even got hold of the hot irons when Mrs. Heybrook had to leave them for the dinner-getting, and polished sheets and pillow-cases and table-cloths with his big strength and careful handling.

The Clarks lived down in the hollow; the meadow mists hung there, and the dank, odorous vegetation of the brookside and the swampy ground brewed subtle malaria "some years." Up on the hillside, it was clear and dry and wholesome-balmy. The natures of the people were like their dwelling-places. Mother Heybrook kept her nature with her everywhere; and she came up from the hollow and the sickness, through the clear pasture breezes, to her high, sweet-aired home; and she held out well. But there came a day, — however, a good many other days came between, and I have to tell of them.

The books came up from Loring's; some lovely worsted-work, begun and colors sorted, from Stearns's; fruit and more solid delicacies in baskets and ice-hampers: for Mr. Everidge spent his week-days in town, and the whole family were devising comforts and amusements for France, now that she was laid up and away from them all. I told you they were nice people, although they were middling in some things; and France was a good deal to them, though she was the middle girl of five. Perhaps they pulled with a little unusual vigor at family ties, just now, from a dim fear of other pulling — of other, scarce-possible, but dreadful-to-be-contemplated hard knots.

France rejoiced in the dainties, by means of which she could do a little part in Mother Heybrook's good work; could also beguile Mother Heybrook herself into a little daintier living than ordinary.

She made up charming lesser baskets and dishes, garnished

with ferns and vine-leaves, and had them ready at the door when Mrs. Heybrook, or a messenger from her, was setting off; and she had some fresh device and deliciousness in the middle of the homely Heybrook family table, out in the shady "long kitchen," when the tired good lady came home.

One thing was noticeable, that she chose her moments; and that it was to Lyman or his mother, if possible, that she intrusted her sendings; she was hardly ever, by any chance, in the Heybrook family limits when Israel was there.

Within the fortnight she had recovered far enough to get up and down the stairs by aid of the balusters, and quite comfortably about the house; but she had not ventured beyond the threshold further than into the front porch or upon the sunset piazza, at hours when Miss Ammah and she could have their places to themselves, — so far, that is, as the farm people were much concerned; the minister did drop in now and then, on his way to and from the village, and usually found them outside.

Rael Heybrook sufficiently seconded her desire — if desire it were — to keep aloof; he busied himself more energetically than ever with his farm work and plans, which now took him to the distant borders of the property. He was surveying some irregular boundaries, and was cutting down a piece of woodland, the timber of which he was to haul seven miles to the railroad station at Creddle's Mills, when the sledding came. For that he calculated to realize a good winter's profit.

These were some of the days between that I spoke of; they were between parts in several connections of my story, — the more, not the less, reason to follow their quiet lines; for nothing ever stays exactly where it was, in days that come between.

It was in this time, as France regained the slight beginnings of her liberty, which were yet such mere enlargements of imprisonment, and as she seemed rather contentedly to accept and adhere to their limits, that Bernard Kingsworth came into nearer opportunities of knowing her; of contact with her thought and character in such ways as make days like weeks, and weeks like years, either for the friendships and drawings together, or the antagonisms and ploughing of great gulfs, in our human, which are our eternal, relations.

The young minister had always been in the habit of calling a good deal, in a quite friendly and casual way, — the chances playing in with, if not originating often in, the friendliness, as they never would have done in an unsuited or indifferent acquaintance, — on Miss Ammah, in her abidings at the farm. His way to and from the village, when he did not take to the river-path and the woods, lay over the hill; and he was often the bearer of the "forest mail," that came in by night, after the day mail had been received and brought to them at the regular twilight hour.

Mr. Kingsworth never deliberately — as Mr. Everidge might have said in regard to his own sort of business subjects — "talked shop"; that is, he never talked the technicalities of his profession, or treated of religion as a commodity; he never came, of purpose prepense, in his character of minister; I should say, upon an errand as preacher. He left his gown in the pulpit, as Miss Ammah had remarked of him when she had first met him; though, literally or metaphorically, he wore no pulpit gown at all, anywhere; certainly not among these barehanded, common-vestured farmer people who were his hearers.

Yet what was in the man came forth from his lips, if he talked at all, inevitably; as the merchant, studying trade and the world, though he may not utter invoices or the monetary returns of the day, will yet by his view and grasp of things, whatever they may be, show the point and hold he has in command of what the world concerns with, and be still the man of wide relations and economies in all that he handles and discusses. In his very avoidances, as much; as wife and daughters, busy with their small social or personal detail, quite often experience. The eye and the ear of a man, and, of necessity, the natural speech, which feeds itself through eye and ear, are open to and opened by the range in which his working power puts forth; and he directly and consciously, or insensibly and by side-drift, first comes to his choice of tools and craft, and then fashions all he does, his very thoughts and internal manhood, with the habit of his calling and to the quality and uttermost intention of that which he has taken up to do.

The carpenter at Nazareth — the *Son of the Builder*, like David — was in truth the very Builder of the world.

So, if I try to bring you into these pleasant, unhampered, summer-day companionships, where were met together a young nature, new to life, and asking questions of it and of itself,— a conversant womanhood that had shared and observed the world with keenness for seeing and strength for experience, — and a man's power and training, directed, of the highest joy and purpose, toward true interpretations of that which is written, not between any two covers only, but between the covers that are put as the upper and the lower waters of the firmament, and hold the world of the creation and its working,— that is, all living meanings and all passing things,— you need not find the fault with me or with the man, if the word of the meaning sometimes speaks through the ordinary talk. They who do not enjoy the company and the occasion may quite easily pass on; but they must miss, so, something of what most essentially belongs to the story they are superficially impatient for.

One afternoon — the light flickering soft through the maples, and the still boughs framing little pictures of orchard and sloping grain-field, and mountain-side black with shadow, and blue horizon-tips misty and faint with the full, upper sun-pour — France leaned, a very picture herself of a delicious ease, unafraid of break or obtrusion, in Miss Ammah's long sea-chair, that she brought here always for her "mountain deck"; beside her, on a little white pine table, her bright wools, the work she was busy on, her last books, her patience-box, and a plate of superb, amber-ripe, early plums; Miss Ammah herself close by in the comfortable rocking-chair "with a slump to it" from the east sitting-room, and her work, some quite plain, old-fashioned "white-seam," in her always busy but never hurrying hands.

Mrs. Heybrook came out, bright from her fifteen-minute nap, her hair freshly smoothed and turned up in its thick gray twist, — she had no time for caps and she was thankful they were out of fashion,— and her clean lilac cambric "polonay" tucked up with just one pinch over her black alpaca skirt. The "mixed wool" knitting work in her hand showed that she had come to "visit a little."

Miss Ammah knew better than to offer her the rocking-chair. To do that would be to scare her altogether from perching in any way. Left to herself, she came around to the red rocker, on the other side from France's table. Then Miss Ammah said, rather imprudently even yet, "That 's right, Mother Heybrook; sit down."

"Sit standin'," said Mother Heybrook. "That 's all I ever do, you know." But she put out her hand and took a thick, paper-bound book from the pine table. It was the "Marquis of Lossie." "My! what a sight o' readin'!" she exclaimed, turning the double-columned leaves. "It 's a story, I s'pose. It 's a wonder to me how so much that jest a *story* could ever be allowed to happen, in this drivin' world!" Mother Heybrook used "allowed" in the sense of "supposed," or "held probable." "An' let alone happenin', how any one man could ever stop his own work to write it all down. My!"

"You see that is precisely his own work, Mrs. Heybrook," said France, smiling. "And that is only the second part of one story," she added, for the fun of the effect.

But Mother Heybrook could take in the two as well as the one, while her mind was on the stretch. "Well, there 's differ-'nces of gifts and administrations, but the same sperrit," she *allowed*, with a generous toleration of George Macdonald. "It takes all sorts o' folks and all sorts o' workers to make up the world to the Lord's mind. I s'pose *'t is* to his mind, but I don't have time to see through but a small piece of it. There must, too, be a sort o' people set apart a purpose to do the readin', seems to me."

At this moment, a youth with two baskets, one in either hand, came across the grass slope toward the house from the roadway, and, seeing Mrs. Heybrook on the piazza, turned his steps to the end entrance of that, instead of keeping on around the house to the kitchen door.

At sight of him France took up her patience cards. She had seen him before, when she had been with Sarell and the house-mother in the domestic precincts of the dwelling; and she had made enough acquaintance with him to find that just a dash of coolness and acidity was a good accompaniment to conversation with him, as one takes lemon juice with raw oysters.

He wore, and kept on, a big, flapping straw hat, which was the regulation chapeau of the hay-makers and field-workers hereabouts,— a wonderful construction, with high, round crown, independent of any fashion of all time, and a slope of brim that dipped and ended simply with reference to the horizon line of the earth, and not to the style or effect of the human countenance. From under this particular specimen of the picturesque "big pyramid"— as France had christened the head-gear, because of its essential relations and earth proportions — looked forth a face impertinently handsome, imperturbably self-assured, defiantly "as-good-as-you-are." And this is just the sort of face that can hardly ever get the worse out of it again,— though the worse of it be not so very bad,— or the better of it,— that might be so very much better,— in. It belies itself, long after there are better things to be expressed in it. But the objectionableness of Flip Merriweather's face was that as yet it told an "ower true tale," and no contradiction. "He was real bright," Mother Heybrook said of him, "but as consated as a young rooster that had just got the swing of his tail-feathers." He had russet-brown hair,— more red in it than there was in Rael Heybrook's,— eyebrows and a soft moustache-line of a deeper color, and under the shade of the former, which were low and level, a pair of changeable blue eyes that twinkled like water in the sun, or darkened, when a cloud came over, till they grew shadow-black. He was the young brother-in-law of Doctor Fargood, who had married Grace Merriweather, a farm-bred girl, daughter of plain old Moses Merriweather, of Wakeslow, in the back hills. Flip had come here a few years ago, on his father's death, with a very little money, his share from the sale of the farm, his fresh verdancy, his quick adaptabilities, and his prospects, which were those of every American-born citizen, and ranged from the plough-tail to the presidency. He had since then alternated between winter schools and summer farm work for the doctor.

He had been one year at the academy at Askover, and that having been the close of his opportunities, as far as he could reckon upon them, in that line, he reckoned himself, in a certain way, as finished; capable, at any rate, of going on in

any specific direction, and of his own impetus, if he took a mind.

He liked books, if he might pick and choose, and he read the newspapers, and remembered, to retail glibly, what men further out in the world were saying of things. He had no idea that there was very much going on anywhere that had not come round to him. Moreover, he did not thank it so very much for coming round. He felt as if it were he that had picked it up, merely, as the young rooster does the corn, not noting how or why it had come to be scattered for him. Really, he was rather in danger of getting finished, right where he was, which would have been as bad a thing, short of moral evil, as could have happened to him.

He had interested France when she had first seen him, and he would have done so still could he have kept his place sufficiently to have been safely observed in it; but in one or two little civil talks she had had enough, she thought, and had not cared to invite speech subsequently. The spirit of her order, which she abjured wherever she could honestly please herself in despising it, came up in her again against this sort of thing, for which it had its use, and she snubbed Flip deliciously.

Flip — or Philip, as you see he would be properly called if he ever grew enough to outgrow the fit of the other — understood her perfectly; hated her a little, — while capable of being charmed with her, — with a saucy, not malignant, hatred; wore his most indifferent airs in her presence; never failed of an opportunity for being there, or of there demonstrating himself; continually, as it were, firing off some little Fourth of July crackers by way of declaration of independence.

She was the first person he had ever met — he fancied that coming within the same ten square feet with her, in Mother Heybrook's kitchen stoop or front piazza, was meeting her — in whom he had encountered that subtile element of higher degree, which sets the lower to measuring itself by the very tiptoe stretch with which it holds an assumed level. There has been the minister, indeed; there was Rael Heybrook; there was the lady, Miss Ammah Tredgold. But Rael never assumed, never held himself, so to speak, at his real altitude. Flip felt, in regard to him, that he did n't show for his chances; and

there were gravity of office, and the years of half a lifetime, between him and the other two, to set them separate. Besides which, it is quite possible to walk along one's daily path unabashed by the overshadowing of the cedar-tree, or the growth of the lithe ash sapling, easily bending and making no pretence of girth, or the fixed stature of the little, gnarled, old-lady apple-tree, to be suddenly surprised by a rose-tree, whose gentle sprays are fresh and young at a foot grade, but whose topmost dancing leaves fling their dewdrops over one's head or in one's face, and whose proud-sweet blossoms may not be approached for the thorns that are set invisibly around them.

Only a girl, with her white ruffles and delicate ways, her crochet work and her story-books, her low-trained speech, and the sweep of soft garments, whose hems seemed to signify a circle about her that held her in some withdrawing element separate from the common air; and yet it was common air and common ground anywhere that she might choose to be, except for the very time that she was there. In that place and that moment, though it might be the chicken-yard, and the moment when his way lay through it with some man's errand or business, and she had neither errand nor business at all, he felt himself, in spite of his fixed mind about himself, put aloof: a creature stood there with miles of impassable atmosphere between her and him, *somehow*. It was this *how* that he set his indifference and his defiance against. He might as well have tried to jostle a rainbow. But he could not keep himself content out of the spray of it.

He had come now with some supplies to Mrs. Heybrook, as he did often. The baskets held fish and fruit; a dozen splendid silvery, speckled trout in one, bedded in cool handfuls of fresh grass; in the other, great blue mountain berries, rich with bloom, and heaped with that effect of abundance which shows with the heaping of round forms as with nothing else, so individual they are, so revealing of each other, touching ever but at one single point, but so unnumberable.

Mrs. Heybrook got up as he came into the piazza.

"I told you so," she said, "I never get set down but somethin' comes along to rise me up again. Too, I 'm glad it 's you,

Flip, with your trouts and your berries. Those come from Thumble."

"Yes, *marm*, from the tip-top. They don't grow anywheres else."

He was sure of himself there, at any rate. The tip-top of Thumble, mastered for a peck of berries, was no small thing.

"What does *Thumble* mean?" France asked in a gently restricted voice, looking up at Mrs. Heybrook as she passed her with the baskets.

"Why, Thumble means that long, scraggy mountain you see to the right, over the shoulder of the oak ridges. Did n't you know?"

"Oh, yes; I've heard them call it so, but I mean why? Why Thumble?"

"Well, I don' know as I can tell you positive. It may have got its name from the *tumble* of it; it drops clear down a thousand feet into the river the other side; an' again at the Bend, this way, it 's a straight pitch to Mill Hollow; the only way over it is a slant betwixt the two. Or some folks say it 's properly 'Tim Bell,' from a man named Tim Bell that got killed by a bear there. But if he did, 't was a hundred years ago, an' I don't s'pose anybody knows. I'll take two of these trouts down to 'Lando to-night. They 'll be real relishin'."

"Now Mrs. Heybrook!" expostulated Miss Ammah, "you said you would n't go down there to-night. Why don't you *send* the fish?"

"La sakes, 't ain't nothin' jest to slip down with 'em. Tryphosy, she 's busy with Emmerly, an' likely 's not she 'd set 'em away till mornin'. I 'll jest see he has 'em."

"That means, dear Mrs. Heybrook," said France, in her peculiarly sweet tone when she felt special kindness, "that you will cook them and carry them to him, and wait till he has eaten them, and then wash the plates! Why don't you ever remember that you are tiring yourself out?"

"O, put tire to tire an' at it again! that 's the only way in this world, Miss France." And the cheerful old Samaritan disappeared with the baskets.

The Yankee fashion of utterance is much like the Scotch:

they to whom it is native, however properly they can upon occasion give every vowel its due, and economize their negatives, and deny themselves their clipping apostrophes, invariably abandon themselves to the vernacular when they are most hearty or most graphic in their talk. France Everidge's musical speech, just as earnest and as easy in its flow, yet adulterating no sound nor abbreviating any syllable except the everyday "do not," contrasted itself with Mother Heybrook's enunciation, and limited Mr. Flip's attention. He pared the rind of the gracious fruit, and took the paring instead of the sweet heart of it. More than that, he thought, or put on the air of thinking, that the rind was meant to be flung in his face. Around over Mrs. Heybrook's shoulder! That was the absurdity and the vanity of the boy.

"Up in this part of the world, Miss France," he said, carefully pronouncing, "where we have not quite the leisure to devote to the minutiæ of our ways, we — ain't ha'af se' easy tuckered aout."

France spread out her cards, a column of aces in the middle, four cards each side, for the "Egyptian." "I beg your pardon, Mr. Flip," she said, catching herself up as one preoccupied, who perceives she has been spoken to and seizes on the escaping echo of the last few words. "Took a doubt? Of what, please?"

"Not in the least degree of your perspicacity, not the least in the universe," returned the youth, delighted with the skirmish, and getting up a notch higher yet on his conversational stilts, "only of your comprehension of how country people can hold out. I suppose, now, you could n't climb Thumble, and you would find it hard to believe that anybody could if they did n't bring the berries down."

France left him to his supposition, holding her fingers thoughtfully on her "end cards," while she, really, not pretentiously, threaded in her mind the possible moves to clear a line.

Miss Tredgold came to the rescue of civility. Flip, in his turn, had taken up "The Marquis." In the midst of her calculation France sent an anxious glance from under her eyelids; she did not like to have Macdonald fingered profanely.

"Have you read 'Malcolm'?" asked Miss Tredgold.

"No, ma'am," with a slighter emphasis on the address than he had given Mother Heybrook, "'t is n't in my style. I have n't got the gift of the tongues. It's too much trouble to make 'em out."

"Which tongues?" asked France, unable to resist. "There were tongues once, you know, which every man heard according as he was born."

"Was there?" drawled Flip supremely. "I s'pose I 'm not to the manner born at all, then."

"Or have n't got hungry enough in the wilderness, perhaps," said France, going back to her cards.

"What a lot there is of it, alwiz," said Flip precisely, as he thought, and turning the leaves without lifting the book. "All that 's a hard road to travel just to come at a few particular kinks the man has got in his head."

"It 's a long *climb* up Thumble," remarked France demurely, accenting delicately the "climb."

"I say!" cried Flip, falling into more elegant English than he knew, "don't haul me over Thumble again!"

"Those great sweet berries don't grow anywhere else," said France.

Flip laughed, and flashed his eyes at her again from under his hat-brim.

"I say!" he repeated, just as if he had been reading international stories, and perhaps he had, "you can hit fine. You 'd do to preach, yourself. But what do you suppose our minister would think to see you playin' cards?"

"He would think it just what it is, — a game of patience."

"If he should just come up now, he 'd —"

"He 'd take his hat off first of all, Mr. Merriweather," interrupted the minister lightly, and suiting the action to the word, as he came up by France's side from behind her. Flip Merriweather, of course, facing the piazza-end, had been watching him across the grass sward.

Flip laughed again; but somehow the next instant the "big pyramid" was lying on the settee beside Mr. Kingsworth's panama.

Mr. Kingsworth had drawn up a chair. France made a motion to sweep her cards together.

"Don't do that," said Bernard. "I would like to be shown 'patience' presently."

"It is Egyptian patience," she said, "which I believe is rather obstinate."

"The patience of Pharaoh? I should infer so," said Mr. Kingsworth, smiling.

"Mr. Merriweather," said France, reinforced in some mental strength, if not her patience, "will you be so kind as to hand me the book if you have done with it? I am reverent of Macdonald," addressing herself to the minister, and smoothing the paper covers of the volume. "I buy him in paper and then I have him bound more honorably, as you do not find him bound yet in the book-shops."

"Did you ever see the man, Miss France?" asked Bernard.

"Yes. I don't know, that is, whether it was the man or the angel of him, Mr. Kingsworth. It was what always —" France stopped. She could not quote Scripture unreservedly, though it often came close to her speech, of certain things.

"Beholds the face of the Father," Mr. Kingsworth finished. "I can believe that."

"I saw him in the pulpit, when he stood up in the place of the Prophet Isaiah, and read 'Comfort ye my people,' as if it had just been given to him, and had never been heard before. And then he spoke — between the people at the foot of the mountain, and the glory on the top of it," said the girl, blushing at her own enthusiasm, yet carried on by it, nevertheless. "After that, I did not care to see him in the parlors, being introduced to all the silly, curious people, — as well as to the real ones, — and eating ice-creams."

"I should n't suppose he objected to the refreshment," said Flip Merriweather.

"Of the ice-creams? I should think not," returned France, with a perfectly grave face. And there was a slight pause.

"What do you think of George Eliot?" Flip asked suddenly, with the air of coming down upon something weaker with a tremendous bomb-shell of greatness.

"I think she is Thumble without the berries," France answered quietly.

The minister looked at her and smiled, — a quick, pleased smile, — but added nothing, except that, to her remark.

"You were asking about the Osmundas the other day," he said presently. "I have brought one or two numbers of 'Eaton' to show you." And taking up a flat parcel that lay under the panama, he untied the cover and opened the leaves to the "Osmunda Regalis."

There it stood, in color, on the page, — a great sheaf, rearing its fronds, crownlike, and just bending them outward in stately circle; a grandly gracious thing, speaking its word of the world in plainest gesture. France looked at it, aware of the word in such wise as to keep silent.

Flip Merriweather looked too; he moved slightly nearer, along the red settee, to do so; Mr. Kingsworth, holding the book, met his movement as slightly, not withdrawing it from France.

After a moment, Mr. Kingsworth turned the page.

"I was interested in this," he said, "about the name 'Osmunder, the Saxon name for Thor.' Thor the Strong, who slays the giants with his hammer, you know. And yet, the Saxon 'Osmund,' means, some say, Peace, and some say, The Protection of God; also, 'Osmund the Waterman' was the name of the plant in olden time; the white part of the root being good for bruised and beaten hurts, hurts caused by falling from high places. This white pith was called 'The Heart of Osmund the Waterman.' And again, 'Another old name was St. Christopher's (the Christbearer's) Herb.' The thunder and the slaying, yet also the peace; the hurling down from high places, then the healing of the bruised and beaten. The 'Heart of Osmund' means something like the heart of the Great Helper. The Christbearer's herb grows, high and beautiful and self-revelant, in the weeping, waste places, under the dangerous crags. There is a 'correspondence' in that, Miss France."

France turned back to the beautiful drawing, saying nothing.

Flip Merriweather slipped back to his further place on the red settee. "You could make things like that out anywhere, — of anything, — could n't you?" he asked of Mr. Kingsworth.

Mr. Kingsworth simply answered, "Yes."

Flip was baffled by the assent, which agreed to something in his words he had not meant in them.

France sat still, still looking at the Osmunda, growing so low in the waste places, yet so high and fair and precious; waiting, "self-revelant" indeed, below the hard heights of the world, whence one might fall to be broken. Waiting there, with gift of peace. What did it all mean to her? It seemed to say something, — further on, as if she had not come quite to the clear hearing of it, — into a waiting, listening place of her life that would receive it. As if she would be ready for it some time, and that then it would be there.

"I said 'make' things, Mr. Kingsworth," resumed Flip.

"I thought you said 'make out.' But, either way, what do you make of the making?"

"It is n't finding, is it? The thing may n't be there till you make it."

"I think we are all finders, Philip." Mr. Kingsworth always gave him his name, imputing the growing and the outgrowing. "There is only one Maker."

"They are fixed so that you can find them anyhow, though, according to your own make: it 's the shape of your head."

"Precisely. And there is the same maker — or mender — of that."

"If we were all turned out of one mould, there would n't be much account in it, I should say. There might as well be only one of us."

"Instead of that, there is only one truth, and all of us, and all our different ways and measures of seeing it."

"Supposing you don't see it at all?"

"There is still the outside, the parable of it, waiting, as it was put there to do."

"Does n't that beg the question? How do you know?"

"'I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.' You understand the ablative case, Philip?"

"'With, from, in, or by'? that much," Flip answered, laughing. He was pleased with his little bit of academy Latin coming in, being appealed to.

"Then suppose we read 'in,' or 'by,' instead of 'from,' 'the foundation of the world'? Is n't there something in that which explains the putting there?"

"If you take it so. It 's the shape of your head, after all."

"'*Therefore* speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . . Lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them,'" quoted Mr. Kingsworth again. "That is the heart of the healer, waiting for them that shall fall down from their 'mountain.'"

But Flip was still only climbing his mountain. He was pleased at every clutch and foothold he got, that seemed to lift him higher.

"And yet the fog is put there on purpose! it says so," — the boy did not dare say "He," — "'*lest*' they should see, and understand, — and the rest of it! That 's just the way. Why could n't it be plain, if it meant to be?"

"Suppose you fasten the door, at night, 'lest' any unauthorized person should come in?"

"Well, I do exactly that," said Flip, wondering what it justified in respect of a door that he was contending should be freely open.

"And suppose you leave it unlocked 'lest' your brother should come home at midnight?"

Whether he was puzzled, or whether he began to see, Flip made no answer.

"Don't you see there are two 'lests,' — a providing against, and a providing for?" asked the minister. "Take those words with the second 'lest.' 'I speak to them these things in parables; I put them away, in their memory, as in my creation; so that they may see, even without perceiving, and hear, even if they cannot understand; *in case that* at any time, they should see with their spiritual eyes, and hear with their spiritual ears, and understand with the very heart of them, and be converted, and I should heal them.' Is n't the waiting there, in *those* words?"

"You have altered a good many of them."

"I have chosen between those two 'lests,'" said Mr. Kingsworth. "That interpreted all the sentence, which I tried to translate, not change. Because, otherwise, how do they agree with those different words, — 'I am come unto you that ye might have life'; and 'I came to call the sinners'?"

Flip was not quite so instant with his word of objection this time. There was something in those sentences that claimed, at least, the separateness of a moment between them and any smaller speaking. But he was only decently waiting, — though the waiting might have argued something with him if he had questioned it, — and the rejoinder was on his lips.

"That is proving things by the Bible," he said. "Have n't you got first to prove the Bible?"

"Have you got first to prove Euclid before you can take the facts of Euclid?"

"Euclid proves himself, all along. There is n't anything to argue about *but* the facts, and they settle themselves."

"So I think."

"I suppose you mean you think so about the Bible. But people do stuff the whole thing at you, — hide, hoofs, and horns. Do you believe every word in it, — as you do in Euclid, — Mr. Kingsworth?" Flip asked this question deliberately, his eyes not flashing, but fixed, full and wide open, upon Mr. Kingsworth's, as if he meant to know; as if he put the man on common sense and honor, to answer him.

"Do you mean *believe* or *understand*, Philip? Perhaps I do not yet understand, to receive, all geometry, but I know enough to believe that the rest is there."

"I mean, don't you run against anything in it that you *can't* believe? What do you do about Jonah and the whale?"

"At which end of a proposition do you begin? At that which you have already come to see, so as to start from, or at the Q. E. D.?" asked Mr. Kingsworth, smiling. "I don't think I need take the story of Jonah at the *whale end!* There is something in it which I know already. In myself, in other men, and elsewhere in the Bible, — which I may as well say at first I take as an *inside story* of things, — I find that which shows how it concerns me and the world, a reason why it was put

there in Jonah's life, and in the poem of it. I see men every day, I find myself, starting off on wrong tracks, turning away from God's errand, and getting storm-beaten and afraid. I find that consciousness waking up, full of dread, which says, 'I, myself, am the fault of it; through my self-will it has gone wrong for me and for others: cast me into the sea, let me go! I have cast myself there already, I have foundered myself, but the ship must be saved.' And then, for a time, I know a great darkness, mercifully prepared of the Lord, may seize upon the man who comes to the saying of that; and for three days and three nights — a time that seems complete of his whole life, and to be the end and upshot of it, and rounded into a conception of eternity — I, or that man, may be so swallowed of a mighty, terrible *creature* of truth, which is an experience and a fact of it, may be so in its power and devoured of it, as 'out of the belly of it,' 'out of the belly of hell,' to cry at last unto the Lord of me and of the creature, and say, 'I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I *look* toward thy Holy Temple!' And when the man has been brought to that, it is a little thing for the Lord to lead that great circumstance of his, which he had prepared and commanded, and to 'speak unto it' that it shall cast forth his Jonah, the soul of his child, upon the fair, dry land; and then 'the word of the Lord' comes unto Jonah *the second time*, 'unto salvation.'"

The boy, whose cavils were secondhand, borrowed of what he fancied the last word of human progress and the overgrowing of baby myths, and who really had never so much as read for himself the mighty soul-epic of the prophet, but who only knew by hearsay, and perhaps by a curious skimming of the external of the text so far as related to the heresay merely, — that a man had once been said to have been swallowed by a fish, and vomited up again, — stopped where he was left by Bernard Kingsworth; and that was in the Joppa from which he had not started yet, even for Tarshish, to flee from any word of the Lord that had so much as come to him.

Mother Heybrook had brought out the empty baskets, and hearing that which was being spoken, had sat down again, and heard it through.

"There's odd things in the Bible, certin," she said in her sweet old-lady's voice. "And so there is in things an' in people; but when I come across 'em, I jest say to myself, 'There ain't ever an odd that ain't half an even,' and the other half is sure to fit on somewheres."

"Do you remember," said Mr. Kingsworth, — he did not ask directly of anybody; but his sense was now of France Everidge's face, full of some inward movement of light, as it had left the fern-drawing, and rested itself upon the far, gray mountain, — "do you remember 'the sign of the prophet Jonah' that was all there was to be for the generation of the world that looked only for outside proving? I doubt if that generation, as the Lord counts generations, has yet passed away. I doubt if the Son of man, as regards that generation, be not yet 'buried in the heart of the earth,' and if the world may not have to cry out like Jonah before the soul of it can be set free. I think, also, that He knew the truth about that story, when He quoted it to the people against their unbelief."

"It's the other half, ain't it?" asked simple Mrs. Heybrook. And Bernard Kingsworth's smile shone over his face again, as he turned it toward her for reply.

Flip Merriweather picked up his two baskets and his straw hat.

"I did not altogether answer your question, Philip," Mr. Kingsworth said, rising with him. "I do believe the Christian Bible, — for the Old Testament was the Scripture which the Lord said 'testified' of him while he was living the New, — is the book of divine truth, told in the divine language of truth, which is that in the very signs of things and of events; as much as I believe and see that the books of Euclid are the texts of essential mathematical knowledge, told in the language, which proves itself, of lines and angles. I hardly care to reason about it historically and externally, any more than I care to know all about the 'father of mathematics,' and who fathered him, before I accept his axioms and solutions. And until a man has searched the Christian Scriptures for what they integrally *are*, I hardly think him qualified to argue as to how they came about."

It was all said in a very quiet, conversational tone, even with a deference in it of answering a question that inferred the questioner "a man" and in earnest; and Flip Merriweather, though his blue eyes still twinkled unabashed, and his smooth, round chin held itself unrelaxed with any conscious "taking down," was perhaps a shade nearer in that moment to becoming a man and in earnest, and so learning how to be taken down that he might be helped up again, than he had ever come before.

"That has n't gone more than skin-deep after all," said Miss Ammah, as the boy went off. "The question is more with him about swallowing whales than getting swallowed by them or by anything else, and will be for a while. It seems to me that people up here are divided into those who won't swallow and those who think they *have* swallowed all that is required. I should think it would be hopeless work preaching in Fellaiden."

"To preach anywhere, Miss Ammah, one needs to keep in mind that preaching and praying are really the same word. If one had to find it in one's self, or make place for it in others, it would be hopeless, — hopeless and thankless."

"There is the same thing everywhere," said France. "All the school-boys and the very little children in the Sunday-schools are trying their small hands at tipping over the theologies. I had a little girl ask me, what made God tell the children of Israel not to kill when he had just killed all the Egyptians? And then a boy spoke up and said, 'Yes, and he was marching them right straight along to kill all the Ites in Canaan.'"

"What did you tell them, Miss France?"

"I said I did n't know; and I went to the superintendent that day after school, and gave up my class."

"Did he ask your reason?"

"Yes, and I told him I did n't understand the ten commandments."

"Not understand them to keep them? Could you say that?"

"I could n't teach them."

"Don't you mean you could n't teach God's keeping of them? Did n't you let the whale swallow you, then, Miss France?"

"Perhaps I did, but it *was* a whale."

"Which proves the essence of the story of Jonah."

"What would you have told those children, Mr. Kingsworth? The worst was, I was sure that behind the children were the grown people. They did n't think of all that for themselves, any more than Mr. Flip stumbled originally over Jonah. What would you have told them?"

"I don't know, but maybe something like this: those commandments are very great. God knows the whole of them. We only know them as we do them. Perhaps until God gets a world of men ready to work for Him, who *have* learned them by doing them through and through to the very highest they can make of them, He will manage the world as it chooses to be managed, by binding and hindering and punishing and killing, just as He lets fire burn and water drown and all men die once, that He may save their lives forever and ever. *God knows.* That is all I know; and we are to do as He has said, if we want to know Him and His ways and have Him govern us as He governs the angels. And then I might have remembered that we, in our day, have the New Testament alongside the Old, and that that is just why we can pick flaws in the stories of the Old. The very flaws God let be there that men might come to see them. I might have told them what the Lord has said about keeping His commandments, and that to kill was to be even so much as angry with one's brother without a cause."

"You were not there, Mr. Kingsworth," said France gravely. "And the time is full of such flaw-picking, and the right man is hardly anywhere to show the right side of things."

"And yet 'the Son of man is in the heart of the earth'; not dead and buried there, but the living centre and reason of things. That is why the earth trembles and quakes; and in the very clouds that hide and hinder He will come by and by. He *is* coming with his glory."

"I wish you could talk to people I hear talk," said France, "even people in pulpits."

For France, in her young heart, longing for the truth to be true, as every fresh heart does, had been troubled in her world; in the social tone, in the things written and read and discussed;

in her own home, with the practical motive of life, and with the expressed philosophy of it when, after a Sunday sermon, perhaps, or the report of some noted lecture, or of some new idea or theory advanced in an advance paper, right and revelation and providence, — yes, and virtually the very fact of a God, with a God's heart that is human-infinite, and a God's thought and knowledge that are thinking thought and working knowledge, like, only including, the actual thoughts and knowledges of men, — came to be mooted and vexed and muddled with half-arguments, and confused with irrelevancy, and put by into a hopeless limbo, to be drawn forth again another time, only for a like handling and a like vague dismissal, perhaps in consequence, largely, of the pulpit handling which she spoke of; which was getting to be as vague, as ambiguous, as half-hearted, as apologetic, in reference to the very soul and centre and life of these things, — the Lord Christ himself, — as men were with the points that perplexed them, and made them doubtful when they tried to look, without Christ, at problems of right and providence, and what was to come of human life. "Duty, God, immortality," — the very slogan of the pulpit, — these were getting to be as dead words as the motto of the French Republic, because the ideas of them were becoming separated from the thought and recognition of the living Lord, — the only way and truth and life; — dead branches broken from him, and crumbling in men's hands who would make staves of them.

For the first time in her life France Everidge was beginning to get a live answer to things; to one thing at a time, without a forcing of all else in heavens and earths, — except the authority of Him who came down that He might join the heavens and the earths, — into the research.

"They won't let you alone without all the old heathen," said Miss Ammah. "You need n't say anything, — and you 're a fool if you think, — unless you know all about Confucius and Zoroaster and Buddha, and can read Sanscrit, and have been brought up on the Zend-Avesta as well as on King James's English Bible; and unless you are up to the last discovery of how Moses got his notions of creation, and of how the greater part of Genesis was picked up first in Assyria."

"Does it make any differ'nce?" said Mrs. Heybrook, changing her needle, and stretching down the leg of the sock she was knitting. "Don't I get my clear water, runnin' right into my dairy the whole blessed time, through the spouts from the hill? and has n't the spring been there in the hill ever sence the hill was there? an' what if there alwers *was* other hills and springs and spouts, — in Khan-Tartary, perhaps? Don't the water all come from the sea, an' has n't the sea and the sun and the clouds got the whole working of it? Shall I go and break up my spouts, an' go athout my water, 'cause I don' know, exactly, about spouts and dairies in Cochin-Chiny? That 's the way some folks talks, clear up here in Fellaiden, even."

"I 'll tell you why, Mrs. Heybrook," said Miss Ammah composedly. "It 's just because they want to get rid of making the butter."

"Which brings us back to the way of understanding the commandments," said Mr. Kingsworth.

"Jest go t' work and 'tend t' your butter an' things, an' then you 'll see the good o' the spouts. An' there 't is; I 've got to see to that bermonge I made for Tryphosy; it must go down with the trouts," and good Mrs. Heybrook was up and off again.

France had begun replacing her cards. The wind of the mountain had swept them gently together, the one under the other. In her mind was this thought: —

The Great Pyramid workers worked under command, just by inch and cubit; and they came out in agreement with the sun and the stars; and in the middle of it was that man-measure, nothing else; but the way to *that* was the history of heavens and earth. I wonder if it was *made* for chronology and sky-pointing; or if it *had* to be true with them, being true with itself? I wonder if the pyramid was built less for a stone miracle of revelation than to show how everything that stands on the right foundation-line, and builds up by *perfect* inches, comes to what tells of all the miracles, and stands straight up under the sun, so that all the sun-measures are in it? — "Mr. Kingsworth," she put her question aloud, "did n't the pyramid just turn out so, do you suppose, because of that beginning, and keeping on, upon the right inch? and did n't it get square

with astronomy and history exactly because it was first square with the daylight, without Melchisedek, or anybody, knowing how it was to be?"

Mr. Kingsworth showed no perception of disconnection in the quick propounding of this apparently fresh matter.

"I do not think Melchisedek — if he was the *human* architect — did know it all," he said.

"Of course the Lord knew," France answered, in her mind again; and with the word there revealed itself to her, instantly, something that had not come to her in force before. That *thinking Thought* and *working Knowledge*, — that divinely-human might of intellect, moving as a man's brain moves, but with the origination of all the truths that a man's brain labors dimly after in the sciences; determining them into laws and working with them, tools of its substance, to make worlds. And the Heart, whose desire is father of every fact, pulsing as the heart of a man pulses, but with infinite and almighty wish toward the children for whom it waits in the midst of its unapproachable knowledges, — the Lamb in the midst of the throne, — until by little, faint, slow degrees, touching the hem of the garment, they may come to know that it does wait for them; that it is the end and intent of creation, showing itself; the living love of a living Person, who is patient through such cycles as the pyramid measures, with souls that come, — blundering, wandering, presuming, denying, returning, — to that which He has put in the plainness of the only actual speech, into the blazing word of an universe.

Not just or fully in such syllables did the thought come to her. It came as a flash upon her own words, "Melchisedek, or anybody," and the after-thought implied in Bernard Kingsworth's answer, "The Lord knew." It was a glimpse of realization, such as truly she had never had before, of that Humanity which created human beings.

Before anybody, He was the body of Himself, purposing all things and everybody, worlds full, that these should know themselves to be because He was, and the things and worlds to be because He meant them. It is only in a flash, from out the eternities, that we see light like that. It is not possible to

write it down; yet it comes, — to the simple and to the children.

And all this while France sat with those little patience cards spread out before her, and her eyes falling upon them; her fingers, even, straightening them to lie parallel with each other.

Bernard Kingsworth was looking at her; he saw that something, without his saying, was saying itself to her.

They all sat quiet for a little while; Miss Ammah pinching her hems by her card rule, the minister turning over the fern illustrations, as if for something he had meant to show. At some little breath or movement of the girl's, however, as of one come back again into things just around her from an errand that had called her quite away, he put the numbers of "Eaton" together in a closed pile.

"I will leave these with you," he said. "You may find some of your old friends among them, and some strangers that you will learn how to look for. Now, Miss France, won't you teach me your patience game?"

I think it very likely there was some gentle self-seeking, as well as some wise sense of fitness, in his thus leaving the larger subjects where they had rested. I think it very likely that Bernard Kingsworth felt some desire toward a simple, every-day companionship. He did not by any means wish to be altogether in the pulpit, or to wear his gown, in France Everidge's presence, or to her idea. Perhaps, even, he was a little jealous of himself, when he remembered himself as one of the sons of Aaron. A priest may be a priest after the true kingly order, and yet be wistful of a little ordinary recognition on the plane of his mere fellow-creaturehood.

When Mother Heybrook came out to bid them all to her supper table, upon which the door now stood open, letting the fragrant tea-odor and the smell of her "fire-cakes" creep forth with their own irresistible invitation, Bernard and France were laughing like any two young, blithe-minded persons, over the sudden and absurdly easy resolution of the game that had pinned them to some twenty minutes of the most labyrinthine calculation before they had dared to move a card.

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE RING OR ON THE ROAD?

When a subject is to be brought to people's minds, it nearly always bears down upon them from two, or several directions. It is as if the divinity that approaches us with its purposes that are to shape our ends made certain sure bee-lines from far-off points, which should concentre in our consciousness, and, meeting, kindle there some force that should work in us toward the inevitable, that seems the free thought and the free chosen. The very books we read, the gossip of the day, chance encounters and reminders, trifling side experiences, all pour in their drops of influence to swell the current that is to bear us, even when we think we are bearing ourselves most uncontrolledly to the result.

The "Marquis of Lossie" bore down with its large "otherworldliness" and its grand humanity-showing, upon the puzzles and prejudices that were in France's mind, and working there, more than she knew, upon her own story that was to be.

But they did not criticize or analyze — she and Miss Ammah — the "Marquis of Lossie"; it stood too self-manifest in truth and power, too evident in simple presentation of that which is indisputable, to invite dispute or questioning comment. Perhaps it touched too quickly the livest, sweetest, most secret springs of that sentiment in France which responded to its more than charm — its *claim* on the true and earnest and heaven-searching in her — to permit her to bring it to any external judgment; even to praise it, or declare delight in it. France had read it through to Miss Ammah: she was fond of reading aloud, and Miss Ammah was fond of listening.

Then she took up another book, one that had come from the library. It was a clever little romance enough, an English novel, also; not so deep or inclusive as to anticipate query or

make supplement superfluous; they paused and chatted over it, accordingly. This had for subject, too, the circumstances, hardly the heart, of a socially unequal marriage.

At the same time — another bee-line in letters from home — was coming, in numbers, the development of a Boston story of similar drift, in actual life; the drifting into an "odd engagement" of two persons whom one would think, from the Everidge look at it, Providence had been under some temporary aberration in flinging in each other's way.

A girl in "their set," which meant the set that was theirs, if any, since they preferred even to wait at its sometimes uncertain doors rather than to dwell in the open, hospitable tents that pitched themselves just without, had gone quite down into the very elements of society, to attach herself to a man who was really nobody from nowhere, — a mere clerk and drummer for one of the hundreds of little business houses somewhere down town, whom her brother had fallen in with on a railway journey when there had been a smash and a scare, a good many bad hurts, and two lives lost; to which his own — the brother's — might have added a third, but for some stout-hearted and stout-muscled help that the young drummer stopped to give him, when stopping made a question of his own life at the same moment.

The brother brought the drummer to the house, and the ladies condescended to him; bent graciously, I mean, and not without a certain bravery and stoutness of their own that touched the mutual social life as his bravery had concerned the physical when he had come with it to their avail. One, the youngest, and the brother's pet companion, did not bend. She looked upward from the first, as one receiving grace. But this is a story within a story. I have to do with nothing but its moral, and the way its moral came to Fellaiden.

"I think people are 'idgets'!" said France, with a quietness of tone that hardly justifies an exclamation point, but a force in the quietness that cannot be printed without it. "Are men men, and women women, or are they posts that just keep the social stories up, and that can't move a stair's height either way without bringing all the building down?"

"That is n't quite all," said Miss Ammah, who felt it in her conscience to present whatever existed for presentation to this young mind, upon the family side of the society question. "It is as men and women that they are likely, in most cases, to be affected by such differences. You see, all life is n't romantic incident. A man may be brave — "

"Gloriously brave," put in France.

"Gloriously brave : and yet, every day, and all day long, when his bravery is n't demanded, the little things of breeding and habit may be ; and we are such creatures of breeding and habit, and the little things do so make up life ; and to have had the same tastes, ideas, associations is so much between people who must always live together — "

"Miss Ammah," the girl interrupted, and then paused while she counted fifteen stitches for her vermilion-tinted wool in her Turkish pattern, "a lady would n't be likely to marry a clown, of course ; but if she finds a nobleman, who simply has n't come to his worldly estate or had advantage of it, and it is the man and the noble that she cares to pass her life with, — I should think it is for the great things that the little things always grow out of, in a life or a generation or two, that she would care, rather than for the little breedings that have only come down with the teaspoons, and left what first made the name, perhaps, behind them. See ! if Evelyn Westcott had married that little smoke-puff of a Harry Wardell, that whiffled round her last winter, nobody would have been astonished ; nobody would have cried out at a mismatch. And just look at the woman and look at the manikin ! Is n't there any inequality except between a West-end avenue and a South-end cross-street ? Or between a Court-square office and a way-down-town sample-room ? "

"Very good for an argument as to the nobleman and the manikin ; but, my dear France, first catch your nobleman, and grant that the manikin is n't inevitable as an alternative, or in polite circles. And remember, in your early wisdom, that, until your creature *is* caught, you can't thoroughly determine, always, between Lepus and Leo. You can't wholly know what a man is until you 've married him."

"You can't wholly know what yourself is till you've lived your life out," returned France. "You can't see your whole day's road in the morning; but you know which way you want to go, and people who mean to travel together must at least be starting the same way. And the question is whether they are, either or both of them, starting at all. A riding-school ring does n't lead anywhere."

It was tolerably plain that this young woman would take her head, when she had once determined in what direction to be headlong.

Miss Tredgold left the main track of argument, and shunted off upon an old turnout.

"I don't know anything about Miss Westcott's affair," she said; "she may have caught her nobleman. But the girl here in the book, however the author represents it, — and authors do mostly tell two different things in pretending to tell one; the actual story, which speaks for itself in spite of them, and their interpretation of it, which they have to be as ingenious about as people are with their own consciences; — this girl in the story just falls in love from mere propinquity. Somebody else in the same place would have been the same, as they would in half the real matches. *That's* what a woman has to look out — I mean *in* — for, in questioning her own mind."

Miss Ammah thought she had touched the subject with a very skilful wisdom now. It was well to have suggested that word and that self-analysis to a girl like France, who, even in really finding a nobleman, must not too hastily find him to be *her* nobleman.

But France took her up with that curiously veiled force again.

"Propinquity? Dear Miss Ammah, don't *you* say that. I detest the word. It 's as if one could n't come within gunshot. It 's like that miserable coon, — 'Don't fire; I 'll come down.' Women are not like that, unless it is with each other. You *can* be thrown with a girl you don't care a pin for, and be cosy, just because she is another girl; but a man, — you 've either got to like him like a man, or hate him like a scorpion, or turn out for him as you turn out for a toad."

She said it all without a single exclamation point in any tone. Of course she spoke from no personal feeling, so why should she exclaim?

Meanwhile, across two valley hollows, and the low flanks of two spurs of the great intervening hill, on a strip of roadway three quarters of a mile off by a crow's flight, and a mile or more by the road-winding, she had caught a keen glimpse of a moving speck about as big as a crawling fly. She knew the crawl of it, which was not a fly-crawl, however modified in effect by distance and foreshortening of line of motion; and she knew that Rael Heybrook was coming homeward from the Gilley wood-lot.

"Don't you think, Miss Ammah, it would be nice up in the hay-mow this afternoon? I've a mind to try it. Come, and I'll finish the book to you."

"Come? You? How will you get there?"

"I feel a capability in my bones," France answered. "I knew it would be there again some day. I can do it with a stick."

"But the stairs? Not a scrap of a rail, and so steep and twisting! You might be helped up, but I could n't do it. You 'll have to wait, I guess, till somebody 's at home."

"I don't want any rail. I hate help," she said quickly, with a venom in her last words thrown in as she indignantly perceived the quibble in her first, "and I've a kind of hankering for something steep and twisty. I can kneel up, or I can sit up; but I must take time for it, so come, please. I know you 'd like it; and the big windows are open, and the west wind is blowing through."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAY-PARLOR.

THE men had left the little north-corner loft just comfortably piled with the new, fragrant hay-crop. All the rest of the barn buildings — a chain of three — were stack full. Miss Ammah always bargained for a "hay-parlor."

Across the wide window-space above the doors were strong wooden bars, against which, half-way up, the middle mow pressed its affluent bulk, and the wind swayed pleasantly the stray, escaping locks. Over the bars the opening of the heavy shutter left a breezy space, and the wide cracks in the side-boardings of the old barn let the air sift through in a sweet, wandering way, even down in the low north corner; and the sunlight lay here and there in slender golden lines across, making the tangled stalks show an intricate, illumined mesh-work.

Quite up in the shade, against a luxuriously heaped slope, they sat and leaned, — Miss Ammah and France Everidge. Miss Ammah had brought book and baskets. They had two hours yet before the early tea-bell; Mrs. Heybrook was resting in her bedroom; all across and through the roadway, doorway, open house, and farmyard dropped delicious silence; it was the luxury of absolute uninterruption, and the absence of all claim upon them. At first it was too delightful for anything but itself. Book and work waited.

"There is n't in all Commonwealth Avenue such a room, such perfection of upholstery, such gilding, such conservatory sweetness, as here!" said France. "Dear Miss Ammah, every city covers up a piece of the country, and every 'artistic' living — nobody says 'artificial' now — covers up what might be got straight at, like this!"

"The people among it seem hardly to get it, though, as we do, who come on purpose for it. They don't have time. It is too hard work to live, — to *make* the hay and the butter, to plant the farm and feed the creatures, and provide for the 'men-folks.'"

"Might n't they have time? With all the machines, and the bigger way of doing and dealing, there *might* be a way of farm living that should keep the deliciousness for family use. I suppose their fashions are handed down from the old times of the incessant spinning and weaving and hand-sewing in the house, and the hand-hoeing and mowing in the fields. They do have their ways of being fine, too, without being blessed. They sit in their 'best rooms' when they have company; when out-doors the hay-mows are the real best rooms. I believe I —" But what France believed of herself she did not go on to say. She did not go on to say anything for some minutes. A kind of dream surged or floated pleasantly through her mind. Of how people, knowing something of how to choose and use things, might make life on a farm like this as big and as beautiful as "all out-doors," having all out-doors for its summer doing and delight, and the long time-wealth of winter for its in-drawing, its thought-growth, its refining; so that summer and winter, with their beauty and fulness, should play into each other with something more than mere seed-time and harvest, physical labor and rest. She wondered if the young generation — if the young men of this day, with this day's chance for getting and knowing — would do like their fathers; if Israel Heybrook, for instance, supposing he had to be a farmer all his life, would n't — And then, suddenly, the thought took vision-shape of some home that must be here if he lived on, — some companionship, some woman-rule, after Mother Heybrook's day was done. And what — whom — could Israel Heybrook find, or bring here, for that? I have to finish out a sentence which was no sentence with her; was only a perception, which, when it began to define itself from the vague mist of her dream, made her start, and feel her very thought turn hot suddenly in her heart. What business was it of hers, and why should she find herself planning life for this farmer Rael?

This farmer Rael at this moment drove his wagon into the barnyard.

Now, of course, there was neither offence, nor suspicion of offence, between these two, the young man and the young woman. They had not come into intimacy near enough for that. They were intimate only with each other's phantasm. In thought-image they had, consciously or unconsciously, come to that point that they were seldom absent the one from the other; in actual presence, all that differed in their daily place and occupation, all that was utterly unlike in circumstance, the very relation that set them briefly under the same roof, held them naturally and easily apart, if they would have it so, or if they would not positively make it otherwise. Miss Everidge's seclusion, and Rael Heybrook's work at the other side of Fellaiden Hill, had, without strangeness, made this nearly three weeks' suspension of anything that could be named as intercourse. There had been chance for kind inquiry, and kind thanks in answer. France had turned pointedly aside from nothing; she had only not moved toward it, and Rael could not possibly know how much or how differently she might have moved.

There was a curious delicacy in him, also, which, perhaps, or perhaps not, France missed taking into perceptive account. He would not linger by her now, in her enforced stationariness, when he found her surrounded by her books and work in her piazza chair, as he might have done had she been still able to choose freely, and stay or go for herself. He would bring her some little wildwood or hillside token, — a bunch of ferns, or a branch of berries, or a handful of strange, lovely marsh or mountain blossoms, — would ask, in a courteousness that never reminded of courtesy, of her gain and welfare, and then, after some mere scrap of conversation, would pass on. He was a busy man, and France Everidge was an idle woman, so the idle woman thought; and what should there be to hold him there, or make any long companionship between them?

Perhaps for the very reason of this slight and fragmentary intercourse, so restrained on both sides, and that could hardly be called intercourse, the three weeks since they had been so really and wonderfully together over the hill roads and in the

sweet woods and the ravine of jewels, seemed now between them little more than the blank of a night, across which the last thing that happened was that most vivid to each separately, and that to which the next would join itself, however it might be ignored, when, or if ever, such association between them should begin again.

Propinquity? There is nothing in simple adjacence half so perilous as a certain distance, an ellipse of orbit, that brings two together in mere comet flashes of approach, and leaves them, with a trail of light across their heavens, in separate wonder about each other's nature, and by what calculation they may ever cross each other's strange and lovely way again.

The day upon that Mountain of the Precious Stones; the dusk in which they encountered a peril and helped each other out of it; the moments in which the strong man held the girl, disabled by a little hurt, as if he would hold her, strong and kindly, from any, every hurt that could be, — those were the last hours and moments in which they had really met.

Rael unharnessed his horse; they heard him below in the shed there; they heard the wagon thills drop; they heard him whistle as he hung up the tackle that was kept handy there; and then they heard the old colt, with scrambling tramp, whose exaggeration sounded like the moving of some mastodon in the small space and on the echoing floor, coming up the deep step into the barn itself, and around into his stall. Rael came after, still whistling, with the halter. Then he pulled down hay for him that teemed itself into the hay-rack from the crowded loft above, and then they heard him cross the open floor, and come to the granary stairs.

Miss Tredgold, when not off on a set expedition, was almost always in one of three places, — in her white-covered rocking-chair by the south-front window of her room, on the west piazza, or up here in the hay-mow. Where Miss Everidge might be, in these days of her keeping greatly to herself, as in the days when she was as apt to be down by the brook, or over in the cedar wood upon the hill, or in the pine-hollow, any five minutes as not, did not necessarily enter into the calculation. Rael Heybrook wanted to speak with Miss Tredgold.

"Are you there, Miss Ammah?" he asked, as his tawny-brown hair and clear, handsome forehead and eyes came up into a streak of sun-light over a billow of hay. And Miss Ammah answered, "I'm here," from over another billow in the far corner, lifting up cap and spectacles to meet him.

"May I sit down here and have a talk?"

"Of course you may."

Over behind, in France's corner, the hay rustled with a quick motion that only Miss Ammah could see; and to that Miss Ammah replied with a clutch upon France's foot that came through conveniently beside her. So France, bidden and upholden, stayed still and listened. Rael was not noticing the sounds; if he had been, they were common enough, and made part of the pleasantness in the dim, sweet old chambers, where the shy hens stole about to their hidden nests, and the brindle cat crept after barn-mice.

"I shall have to give up the Gilley bargain," Rael said.

Now, as the reader does not know what the Gilley bargain was, and Miss Tredgold did, and even France had heard of the plan of purchase, and as Rael is not likely, after the absurdity of some people in stories who are wholly under the author's thumb, to tell it all over again to us across their shoulders, it is as well to say here that the Heybrooks had wanted for a long time, if they could only have spared the money, to straighten the west line of their farm to Little River, a branch of the great stream along whose valley the railroad ran; by this means also to open a straight cut across what was now the "Gilley home-piece," below the Gilley wood-lot that had been bought in years ago to the Heybrook property, toward the railroad, at whose nearest wood-station Rael's logs were to be delivered next winter. This would cut off a long round by the highway; it would enable Rael to begin cutting advantageously down there, instead of at the hither end of his large forest tract, whence the old cart-road came back and debouched upon the North Sudley turnpike. It would make a fine difference for him in his season's work.

Old Gilley had a son who wanted to go out to Montana with a young fellow who had fifteen hundred dollars to go out with:

if Hod Gilley could put in as much as five hundred to begin, and go on quarter share, they would make out together. Old Gilley would sell his little remaining tillage, and keep his house-place awhile on rent, working round himself at odd jobs on other people's farms, until Hod should make sure out there; then he would clear all out and go too. The Gilleys never had made out much in Fellaiden; their land had gone bit by bit; but young Horace had taken the new start that a young sucker does sometimes take from an old stump, and people said he would come to something.

Rael had made money last year with his wood, — eight hundred, certain. Then the stock had turned in well; a man had been about buying up sheep for Texas, and Rael had got good prices for his two-year Merinos and Saxonies. He could pay five hundred this fall, he thought, and make it stand him in.

But now, he said, he should have to give it up.

"You see, Miss Ammah, I 'm morally sure of something now, that was n't so likely before, and that Gilley don't know a word of. There 's talk again of a new branch up to Sudley; and if they do that, they 'll strike across west to the Rutland and Burlington, sure; and the Sudley branch will have to run up Little River; and right there, in the southwest corner of the Gilley piece, will have to be the new junction and a big depot. So you see it rather knocks my little plan."

"I should think it made it all the better," said Miss Ammah, simply, all on one side.

"Only I can't afford to pay Gilley the price he 'd ask if he knew the chance," said Rael, as simply, on the other side.

"Oh!" said Miss Ammah. The "oh!" was rather aghast, and had a quiver of doubt in it. For the first time in her life, Miss Ammah entered into the interest of a question such as, with men, involves conscience and interest almost every day; that is, when there is any conscience to be involved.

"But of course it is n't sure," she said. "There has always been talk of it, every now and then. And it could n't come to anything for a year or two. And the Gilleys want the money now, and the price of the land now is five hundred dollars. I don't exactly see —"

"I thought I did n't," said Rael. "At least, I thought I thought I did n't. But I 've been all over it. The road has got to be, sooner or later. And they say some New York men have got hold of it, and they mean to put it through. The lake and mountain travel will cut right across, you see. It 'll just open up this piece of the world; but the first thing that will come in will be the railroad price for Gilley's land, right straight up Little River. I know, by survey, they can't start from anywhere else on the line, or go any other way."

"People out in the speculating world are apt to think that they 've a right to all the advantage they can come at by any superior knowledge or discernment," said Miss Ammah. "That 's all the capital half of them begin with. And if they must give the benefit against themselves, where would the capital be?"

"Where it was, I suppose," said Rael. "In the commonwealth."

"Ah!" said Miss Ammah, "that 's the commonwealth of Israel!"

By this time France had got up in a straight sitting posture. Her elbows were on her knees, and her face was between her hands. Her two cheeks glowed like fire, and her eyes were like planets in a sunrise.

"He 's as honest as the Great Pyramid!" she was saying to herself.

"Of course," said Rael, "nothing in this world is certain. I should n't hardly dare to undertake the thing, paying the five hundred down, and a promise of half the difference in a fair valuation of the land one year or two years hence, say. I might n't make everything out; and land don't all sell at a particular price the very minute you know it ought to be worth it."

He certainly was speaking Great-Pyramid-fashion; he did not even seem to recollect that there was no business fashion of the present day and region that would hold these words of his as common sense.

"Suppose you promised it in your own mind," said Miss Ammah, "to pay when the money really did come?"

"I would n't trust my own mind to be the same," said Rael. "How could I tell? It would look different to me after I 'd had it for my own a year or two, may be. And who knows where he or I would be in that time, either, or what new notion of profit there might be to wait two or five, or ten years more for? No; the fair way is to pay something for the fair prospect now, and I can't do that. It 's an upset all round, anyway: it might upset Hod, and be just the spoiling of him, to put too much in his head about it, yet awhile. It might cheat him out of better than money. He 's pretty near coming out a man, as it is, for all he 's a Gilley. Five hundred dollars in hand would be the making of him, now; but five thousand in the bush, and the bush anywhere from two to five years off, — well, I don't think I could stand it, in his place, myself."

"I think you could stand anything," came from France Everidge's corner, in that strong tone of hers that evened itself instead of ejaculating.

The three seconds' pause after these words pointed them each way, as much as the utterance. Three seconds down for words to drop before they strike water sounds a pretty deep well of something that receives them.

"Thank you, Miss France. I did n't know you were there. I 'm glad you are. I 'm very glad you were able to get here."

"Oh, I 'm able, I hardly cared for my stick. I shall be everywhere again in a day or two."

"Everywhere will be happy to have you," said Rael Heybrook, as gracefully as a gentleman.

"Mr. Rael," said France, "if you measure everything by pyramid inch, which is a thousandth part bigger than other people's inches, don't you see, — in the long run, — "

"You 'll come out ahead?" Rael finished with a laugh.

"One way," said the girl. "But in the way of the world — "

"You 'll have got left out in the cold?" he ended again. "Well, I 've a mind to try that and see. Miss Ammah, that land is cheap, anyway, at five hundred. It lays as pretty to the south as land can, and those meadows cut the best grass, — and the maple lot up next our woods, — why, to say nothing

of a depot right there, with a good stock of cows, and a sugar-works, such as they've got up at Still Pond, — a man need n't go to Montana, or anywhere else, to turn things round."

"I dare say you said that much to Hod Gilley in the first of it."

"Yes. I could n't take the advantage of his not seeing clear through that thing."

"All right," said Miss Tredgold. "But I don't suppose you need pay him for the fact that you do see, and that you've got the faculty for carrying it through. I might as well pay at the worsted store for this thing that I know I can make out of their fifteen-cent yarn." And Miss Ammah held up her pretty shawl-work, of a pattern that the worsted store certainly does not know.

"Or an artist at the color-shop for his thousand-dollar picture," said France Everidge; "or the railroad for ten years' travel over the land they cut through."

Rael laughed. "Hod is bound to go to Montana, and have a twelve-hundred-acre field of wheat," he said. "And he has n't got the money at present for cows or sugar-works; but the money 's there, for a little cash, or smartness, to start it out with. Only, now, if the railroad comes, and the town road is cut through from Lower Village to Sudley Corner, it 's a chance if five hundred would buy two acres of it — some parts — in a few years. And that 's getting more than a fair calculation, unless you let him calculate too."

"Let him calculate," said Miss Ammah, diving after her ivory crochet-needle with which she had been thoughtfully stabbing the hay-mow, and which had nearly slipped away from her down an unsuspected crevasse, "let him know the whole chance, — and the chanciness, — and then send him to me. I've got an idle thousand dollars just now; and I've always coveted a piece of glory-property up here in the hills. Only I have n't felt a right to invest, just for the delight of my eyes, in what might n't do much good after me. I 'll make a bargain with him if you say so, and then I 'll make a bargain with you. You shall hire the land, and take your way through it,

and spend your five hundred on your cows and your sugar-works, on a ten years' lease, for five per cent interest. And I 'll come up here every year and look on. And there sha' n't be a village there at Little River Point, either. I don't want villages on *my* land; I want the river and the hills and the meadows and the maple-groves; a piece of creation, you see, — let alone as much as it can be. They can spread out their junction on the other side if they want to; and they may have their depot in the corner under the red rocks, if they must; it won't show from the house. And that house of Gilley's, — why, it could just be fixed up, — Rael, it would be fine!"

"Who for?" asked Rael, with his pleasant laugh again. "Miss Ammah, I must n't take the advantage of *you*. I must n't let you dream away your thousand dollars all in one minute."

"For me," said Miss Ammah, who always answered categorically. "Or for you. And as to my thousand dollars, ain't I going to make it other *five* some time?"

"Not if you keep the meadows to look at or to hire out for five per cent."

"There 's more than one way of burying in the ground," said Miss Ammah.

Then Rael stood up on the top stair where he had been sitting.

"Miss Ammah," he said, with his tall head a little bent, so that the lines of sunshine played across the brown lines of it, and holding his hat between his hands where he looked down, "this is n't the least how I thought the talk I wanted was going to end. I sha' n't thank you now, for thanking you would seem to take it, and take is n't so easy on the minute as give. I 'd rather you 'd think it over, and if you never say a word more about it, I sha' n't feel it strange. Something else may come to your mind that does n't now. I would n't want any great favor by a surprise. All the same, I do thank you for ever thinking of such a thing for a minute." And so, with one sidewise step downward, he turned on the stairs, put his hat on as he turned, and went down.

"I'll take three days," said Miss Ammah to France, "to let him get used to it in. My thinking is done. I'm not such a sudden sort of a woman as he supposes."

France sat silent. Her thinking was in the very middle. She was not of a sudden sort either. She had but half come to any understanding of herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAM PASTURE.

It was just as Dr. Fargood had promised. The thorough rest which France had taken had let her knee get strong again, almost without her knowing it.

"I believe I could have walked anywhere a week ago," she said to Miss Ammah the morning after she had made that first journey with a stick, over into the hay barn, and discovered that the stick was of no consequence whatever. "I am going to begin to scour the woods again."

"He told you you might have your liberty after three weeks," said Miss Ammah.

"And the three weeks are up on Thursday. On Friday I will go with Sarell over the dam."

That sounded like an extreme proposition; but over the dam was simply across the river by the High Mills to some great pastures that stretched up the oak ridges lying along the foot of Thumble.

The river was everywhere; it wound east and south and west of the farm, and joined the great straight north and south stream at Creddle's Mills, seven miles below. The High Mills were paper manufactories; they made there a certain kind of coarse brown pasteboard, for which they used oat-straw. France had gone there one day to see the works. What had charmed her far more than the works, however, had been the wild bed of the stream below the dam, filled with great boulders, some of them tall jagged needles, some huge rounds with slopes that could be climbed; between were flats and gentle inclines of smooth-worn slabs, with chains and broken heaps of stepping-stones lying in the channels and pools in which the shallow water spread itself and stole about, — wandering strange and dispossessed

where it had once wildly rushed and boiled,— from the back-water of the mill-tail, and the slow drip between the craggy foundations of the dam. That structure itself stretched across some eighty or ninety feet from the flume-head to the opposite bank, and rose twenty-five feet high from the rocky bed below. Above lay the broad, still water, deep from edge to edge of its thicket-fringed banks.

Now, in the wide, pleasant pastures beyond, the blueberries were in perfection; all the way over the ridges and up Thumble they grew in wild patches, open to the high sun, and tangled among them here and there were the bush-blackberry vines, on which the long, beautiful, sweet cones of fruit were turning to their glossy ripeness. Sarell had "been going" for a week past for a regular long day's picking, for plentiful fresh supplies and for a big "preserving."

"You can go as well as not," said Sarell, sliding the last plateful of hot biscuits in among a sociable group of other breakfast dishes. The perfect setting of a country table is to make it look as if nothing else could be crowded in; therefore the first half dozen things are begun with in a bunch like the Pleiades. "Lyme 'll drive us down to the bars with the buck-board; an' he or some of 'em can come along an' take us up again 'fore sundown. You won't have to walk a mite more 'n you 're a min' to. 'T ain't nothin' goin' across the river, either way."

"Too, it 'll be bakin' mornin', Friday," said Mrs. Heybrook, adding the brimming pitcher of yellow cream to the spreading constellation, "an' you c'n have nice fresh victuals for your dinner. We 'll be all through, Sarell an' I, 'fore you 'll want to go, an' then you 'll have a couple of hours before the heat o' the day sets in. When you 're there you won't care. There 's the nicest shady places you ever see, — oak clumps, an' here 'n there great solid pines, two or three together, a hundred years old. It 's alwers cool under the pines."

So, at ten on the Friday morning, with tin pails, full now of turnovers, doughnuts, crackles, as Mother Heybrook called certain crisp bread-wafers of hers that were done on the clean brick floor of the oven every baking-day, and cheese, both ripe and in

little snowy balls of fresh sweet curd that France delighted in ; with a peck-basket for the berries, and a small strapped shopping-basket of France's that held a book, a sketching block and pencils, and some of her wool-work, the two young women set off together on the buck-board, with Lyman for driver, to spend a whole summer's day together, with only the birds and the sunshine and the butterflies, the wind and the running water, the rocks, the sweet waving ferns and grasses, and the sturdy, generous fruit-bushes for other company.

"Safe?" repeated Mother Heybrook to Miss Ammah's question. "It 's just as safe as heaven. There 's nobody there but the Lord and his own creaturs. It 's full water at the mills, an' it 's oat-harvest with the farm folks, an' the berry-children, even, don't get over that way much. They 'll have it all to themselves, an' I guess it 's a clear treat to both of 'em. Those two never 'll find much better days than they 're a seein' now," the good soul added with innocent indiscrimination, as they drove from the door, where the elder women stood to see them off. "They don't know it though. They 're lookin' forrud, I s'pose, like all the young fools before 'em. Sarell 's a real likely girl herself, Miss Ammah, an' she ought to look out an' do well. But that Hollis! too, his looks may misreppersent him, but I *don't* believe he 's smart, — not *her* kind ; but there! *we* can't reggerlate it. An' ain't it good that France is whole-footed again?"

There was something in Mother Heybrook's words that conveyed an obscure kind of sympathetic comfort to Miss Tredgold. Her responsibilities, also, were lifted off her shoulders for one day at any rate. For to-day, in the solitary pastures, it was "as safe as heaven" for France Everidge. She wondered what the minister would say if he walked over this afternoon and found her gone?

"It 's worth sitting still three weeks to find out how lovely it is to rush round again!" said France, as she sprang from the buck-board, taking care, however, to come down on the sure foot.

Before them was a low bar-place, letting in from the roadside to a clumpy bush-growth, through which a narrow path was beaten. Down a bank, this path ran to the river margin, just

above the high dam. They heard Lyman rattle off down the remainder of the hill with the buck-board as they entered a sweet-scented pine shade along the crest of the bank, through which the footway branched to the right and ran along to the mill buildings some eighth of a mile further down, shut in a deep hollow, where the river-bed turned again. Lyman would cross the river here, by the mill bridge. The road followed along on the further side to the village, where he had an errand.

Sarell, the peck-basket on her arm in which were stowed the tin dinner-pails that they were to unpack and then use for their picking, led the way out of the pine belt, down through a fringe of elder and dogwood. Presently the clear water gleamed at their feet, and across it, over the head-gate of the raceway, and from that straight on to the opposite, seemingly far-off shore, stretched the solid line of timber that topped the dam, about a foot and a half wide, — a little more, perhaps, — dry and smooth. The water was all running through the sluice of the flume, for the gates were up and the mills busy. On the left, the sloping planks ran down into the mill-pond, bare for a couple of feet, at most to the water level. This, smooth and sunshiny, lay backward spread for a rod or two, against where a slight natural fall over a low face of ledge gave the first impetus to the current which had once hurled itself down here in a real cataract. On the right was the cataract-skeleton, the sheer descent, and those bare, upward-pointing rocks.

Sarell made straight for the dam.

France, with her basket and her waterproof, followed her until she saw her set foot on the timber, independently broad, but relatively so narrow, that lay across between the still river and the bare, frightful rocks below.

"Sarell!" she cried, "what are you going to do?"

"Go over, to be sure. Did n't we come to?"

"Over there? So?"

"It 's the easiest way. I always do. But you can climb across, down there, if you like," and Sarell pointed down, rather contemptuously, into the gorge. "There 's a plank-way over the flume, a few steps that way, and a pitchy little path down the bank, — if you don't mind your knee."

"Oh, come!" entreated France. "It 's so much prettier that way."

"That 's exactly what you don' know," said Sarell. "You never stood on the middle, there, with the whole river spreadin' up one side, like a great sky lookin'-glass, an' the rocks tumbled together underneath the other, clear down through the gully to the Mill Holler an' the Thumble Bend."

"Of course it 's beautiful, but I never was up in the air with an eagle, either," said France. "Don't be an eagle or a king-fisher, Sarell! Come down with me! Be tame, please!"

Sarell walked on a little way, just not to be too tame, and to show France her free poise on her high standing-place, then she turned and indifferently strolled back again.

"Jest as you say," she said; and they crossed the flume and went down the side path, where the hardhack and the plumy white meadow-queen grew, among elders rich with their wine-storing berries, and glossy dogwood, tempting and treacherous to the touch.

Down among the rocks it was lovely, if ignominiously safe. "Don't hurry!" said France. "It 's too — wonderful — to go away from." She instated herself upon a beautiful sculptured throne, where the ancient waters had scooped out the hollow seat, and smoothed the pleasant incline of the back, and even left a footstool just where a footstool should be. High and dry above any water level that had been for years, its top and sides were dimpled and furrowed and grooved in a tracery of bold natural carving, and the mosses had enamelled and filagreed them with gray and green; and overhead a great jutting fragment, wedged fast between yet higher heaps, held its horizontal canopy above her, shading her from the down-pouring sunlight.

At her feet, below the rocky footstool, ran a shallow ripple of translucent water, which she had just stepped across. Golden-rods, springing in the clefts at either hand, were just bursting their feathery tips into glory, and catnip blossoms, around which wild bees were whirling, held up small, sweet heads from a little islet patch of weedy green close by. The high banks and their heavy thickets shut in all like walls, which the towering structure of the dam, above, and the precipitous front of

Thumble Bend, — an outstretching spur of the mountain mass itself, — beyond the mills, joined with cross ramparts that left no seeming outlet anywhere, except upward, where the crows flew over, and drifts of scattered white clouds slowly sailed eastward in the blue rift.

A little way down from where she sat, the mill-wheels reared and smote with their dripping blades, and the foamy water swept back from their chastisement to quiet itself in lessening surges till it turned away among the stones in another path, and found its onward way again, like a life from out some shattering experience, into placid meadow reaches for a while, till it came to other mill-wheels, and the grasp and whirl and bewilderment of a new catastrophe laid hold of it again.

Sarell put down her basket and her pails, found a resting-place, and waited. She had seen enough of France, already, to know that when she sat down that way, and "went into things," herself, or whoever the other person might be, would have to wait.

The things were entering into France; the depth of the earth-chasm, the tossed, tumultuous rocks, the withdrawn height and peace of the blue day, the quiet humbleness of the growing things that made their home here, the obedient, suffering, escaping waters, the cool sweetness and apartness of this strange place whence the natural flow and current had been diverted, — said things to her as in syllables of some half-comprehended tongue, which she knew only enough to discern a deep, significant sound in, and to lay up as a kind of haunting rhythm, in involuntary memory, to come back to her when she should have power to translate it fully.

At last Sarell said, with an elaborate meekness, "Ther 's berries up in the lot, you know, I s'pose; an' I 've a mistrustin' recollection 't we come to pick 'em."

To which France answered, with a dreamy sort of penitence, "You poor thing!" and dreamily descended from her throne, and turned toward the southern bank.

Climbing that, they came into the sunny pasture. A great flood of sweet air met them, wholly other than the air below, full of ferny balm and minty redolence, and breaths of pines

that were steeped in warmth and moved softly in the thousand-perfumed wind.

And such a hush! Such a summer brooding of the great sky (was it anything of that same sky that held itself so far away from the beautiful, deep, broken gorge beneath?) over the lovely wilderness that was lifting up its thank-offering of prodigal fruitage far and wide.

France sat down again within a little circle of low bushes, on the crisp, tawny grass. All around her tiny branches bent, blue with crowding berries, doing all they could in the teeming, hungry earth. A wild bird startled from a nest among some tall, sweet ferns, and, peering in, France saw four little eggs, the promise of some second brood. An emperor-butterfly settled on a stem and floated off again, with staggering wings just unfolded from their chrysalis; and again the crows flew over, chanting their rough note, but here they only made a mighty peace more peaceful, wafting their long, slow way across a limitless sweet heaven.

White birches gathered in groups, — sociable little gossipy trees that they are, — whispered to each other continually with their silvery, light-hung leaves; underneath, the prettiest little miniature things just like them, each perfect in branching and proportion, were springing up to be the birches of a gay society by and by. The ground was fresh and glistening with them, and other lovely new beginnings of forest life.

Here and there a great oak stood solitary, like a strong, thoughtful soul reaching up to the clearest airs of heaven and drinking deep from the purest fountains of the earth; holding fast with the under-nature to that in which it was set to grow, and spreading forth live, free perceptions to touch and assimilate the sunlight and all its invisible forces.

Pine copses skirted and islanded the pasture. Mixed with their spicy, dense verdure was the shining luxuriance of laurel, that six weeks ago had been robed in pink, covered from crown to root with its great clusters of wax-like, rosy cups. Among the moss and pine needles, tiniest running vines, matted into firm tapestry, carpeted with wonderful evenness the shaded floors of many a sweet wood-parlor.

Sarell was urging her way already through the thickly growing fruit-jungles; the drop of the berries had long ceased to sound on the tin bottom of her broad pail. The doughnuts and turnovers were stowed safely in the cool of one of those little pine-tree bowers, where they would eat their luncheon by and by.

France began, of conscience, to be industrious. She grew fascinated with her gathering; the large, bloomy-blue clusters fell from their stems at her first touch, raining down into her pail, until she too had passed beyond the rattling stage of mere commencement into the full, silent, steady accomplishment of undoubted work. The finger-tips, used to dexterous fine handlings, moved nimbly at their new task, perhaps scattering less than the more forceful grasp of Sarell's; and the farm-maiden, who was a famous picker, was surprised when the city damsel came round at the same moment with herself to empty the "quart kettle" into the peck basket.

"It won't take us time enough," she said. "We might as good 's calc'lated on a ha'af bush'l."

"I 've my straw basket," said France. "And here are the pails themselves. And we could even make a pile of berries on the moss, and let Lyman come back for it."

"Should n't be a mite astonished if we did. An' *then* we sh'll hev' to leave all Oak Ridge and Thumble. It 's a turrible country for berries, in the years of 'em. Why, over there in the chestnut runs, right between the two villages, is enough to more 'n satisfy the folks; so 's 't they hardly ever take the trouble to come here, 'less it 's for a reggl'r picnic party once in a while. But I tell you these berries is jest a *achin'* t' be picked. I can't more 'n look at 'em 'fore they 're in the kittle."

"I wonder what so many are made for!" exclaimed France.

"Lor! it 's no use wond'rin' about that," said Sarell. "Ef you 're goin' t' begin, you 'll hafter keep on. 'Ts a wonder t' me what ha'af the *folks* was made for, let alone berries."

Sarell spoke with her mouth full. France was picking, delicately and dutifully, without so much as remembering that there was plenty of fruit for eating also. But it is one of the minute differences that high human civilization has made, that

its advance breeding results in a creature who has forgotten the instinct of browsing, and adheres only to the periodical ceremony of eating, to which its necessity has become reduced.

When their dinner time came, however, France was delightfully hungry. The peck basket was almost full; the sun was high, and the very birds were nooning in the thickets. She and Sarell withdrew into their pine parlor. Of all their great outdoor palace, they chose one small, secluded chamber led to by a long green gallery that wound slightly as it threaded inward from the open hillside to this cool depth. A thousand beautiful growing embroideries and hangings adorned and clothed its still and fresh interior. One broad old stump, embossed with lichens and moss-evened to a table-level, served for their setting forth of food, and the vine-knit slope about it, clean from the least rubbish or decay, gave them seats. The close weaving of the branches, with the finer crossings and interlacings of millions of spiny leaves, shut out the heat, and evidently kept the rains from dripping in so as to soak where they could not easily have evaporated. Therefore it was dry and sweet, and only the things that grow in such dry shadow had got habilitated there, but these in their daintiest perfection.

"I did n't know there could be such a place,— happening to be, of itself," said France.

"There 's lots more things that happen than you could bring to pass if you tried," said sententious Sarell.

After which, their thoughts perhaps going apart on different trails, they addressed themselves to their repast.

However blessedly hungry, fifteen minutes of actual eating suffice a properly proportioned human being; therefore, long before their fair noon-spell was finished, they had ended dinner, and France had neatly secured the remnants in Mrs. Heybrook's homespun napkin.

Sarell picked a fern-branch and sat in a meditative fashion, her feet drawn up a little under her, and her knees elevated, upon which she rested her wrists, while she slowly and carefully drew the separate green fronds through her fingers; turning and scrutinizing them in a very examining way, yet with an

unmistakable air of the examination being only illustrative; the real analysis and deliberation going on within her.

"I 've a good min' to tell you," she began, with slower speech than usual, and in that tone which seems to sound from below the ready surface, and then she stopped. If she had been in France's place, she would have known that she was expected to say "Well?" and that then France would have gone on. France did not say "Well?" she only turned her head civilly toward her companion, and left her to her free will. So Sarell had to begin again.

"They happen faster than you *want* to bring 'em to pass, if they once get a goin'."

After a moment's marvel, France was able to join these to the anteprandial words, and to perceive that Sarell reverted to "things." Also that she could not mean natural growths or conformations, such as their present surroundings, which they had commented upon.

"What do?" she asked, relieving very evident expectation this time; and Sarell, getting her catechizing cue, which was to her as the pitch-pipe note, or the choir leader's do-sol-fa to the village singers, started off.

"Well, f' one thing,— Elviry Scovill 's goin' t' leave the deac'n's. Her sister 's goin' t' git merried this fall, an' she 's got t' go home 'n see t' the ol' folks. Deac'n Amb, he 's in a tiew." Sarell paused here again; she told her story like old Saltpetre getting up a hill. There was a water-bar after every little pull.

"Y' see 't he 's hed a kind of a poor spell; 'n he don' know what t' make of it; f'r he hed n't allowed f'r anything like that t'll he was a good ninety-eight 'n a half; f'r his father, he was six mont's a failin', an' he died when he was ninety-nine an' six days, an' never 'd hed a day's pulldown all his life afore. So it all cuts right into the deac'n's plans, y' see; an' Mother Pemble — well, her eyes is a shinin'!"

"I don't think I know much about the family," said France politely. "It is 'Uncle Amb,' is n't it?"

"I sh'd say 't was. An' a beautiful kind 'f 'n uncle he 's ben t' the boys! I 'd jest like to *uncle* him; an' I will, too, ef things don't happen *too* fast."

France began to feel a fresher interest, as Sarell's words flowed more animatedly, and her subject enlarged.

"An' Hollis Bassett, he told me las' Sunday, that the ol' man was actilly goin' t' give him shares, at last; beginnin' in the winter, of course, t' count work. Now Hollis, he 's a kind 'f a goose,—'bout some things,— an' he can't more 'n ha'af make up his mind,— or make up his ha'af of a mind, whichever 't is," said Sarell, laughing awkwardly. "He 's got possessed about keepin' store,— did y' ever hear of sech a thing 's a forty-nine-cent store, France?"

"No, I certainly never did," said France, keeping eyes and lips grave, and finding herself half amused, half impatient, with Sarell's wandering confidences. But a good deal could be borne with, or passively permitted, in the prevailing deliciousness of the day and place.

"Well, he 's all in a coniption t' be a mercantyle man. An' he thinks he c'n begin that way. I tell him,— he kinder comes t' me f'r —"

Sarell was about to say "encouragement." But the word stopped her, and she did not at the instant think of another.

"For that other half of his mind?" asked France demurely.

"Well, p'raps so. Two heads *is* better 'n one, y' know. He kinder talks things over, an' I tell him 't ain't neither a trade nor a callin'. 'T ain't a man's full business, now, is it, Miss France?" The word of respect might be accidental or propitiative. Sarell evidently wanted some light or some upholding. She looked anxiously at Miss Everidge, and a sudden movement of her fingers stripped all the pretty fronds from the fern-stem, and left it a very bare fact in her hand. She began to trace the pattern of her print gown with it, as the dress lay smoothed across her knee.

"I am puzzled sometimes, Sarell, about bigger things than that, to know whether they are trades or callings, or any business at all for a man, in this world," France answered. And that, as yet, did not help Sarell at all.

"Standin' behind a counter, an' passin' things acrost, an' takin' in change, ain't everything. What 's he *made* or *satisfied* or *turned over?* That 's what I 'd like t' know, 'bout 'n ocker-

pation," said Sarell. "'T ain't clear respectable, I don't think, 'less he doos one or t' other."

"I think you 're perfectly right," returned France. "But there are cities full of people who don't do any better; who only stand between,— no, they *don't* stand between!" she exclaimed, with an instantly larger perception of the word; and Sarell went on.

"Now, 'f a man plants a field o' beans, an' weeds 'em, an' hoes 'em, an' poles 'em up, he 's a doin' somethin'; an' when he gethers 'em, then ther 's them more beans in the world. But jest t' buy a few ready-made notions, an' take a cent off a price they ain't ha'af wuth, an' then rig up a shop an' stan' an' peddle 'em out to folks that don't want 'em, but only tickle therselves with savin' a cent a spendin' forty-nine,— sha! a man need n't *know* beans t' do that!"

The unschooled speech set France to thinking. It reminded her of that talk with Miss Ammah, among her sisters, long ago, when she had said that only to *be* middling was to be mean; but to serve between was what every human creature was made and placed to do. Long ago? It was not three months. What made it seem so long ago to France? Was it some of those reality measures she had of late been learning? These thoughts kept her silent for a minute or two.

"Well?" said Sarell, which in Yankee means, according to punctuation, either, "Now I speak, and here 's my mind, or my story," or "Speak you, I 'm waiting."

"I think," said France, "that to find out your real betweenness is the great puzzle and all the good of living. I don't believe there is anything else meant by putting us here."

"Now you talk like Mr. Kingsworth. Ain't he an odd one, for a minister?"

"Is he?" asked France.

"Well," Sarell replied, "I never see one like him. Y' jest can't git red 'v him; 'cause he 's all round, and ain't any two sides."

"What can you mean?"

"Well, I was n't sett'n out to talk over the minister, but I don't mind stoppin' t' say that he ain't allers either fellership-

pin' or exhortin'. That 's the two sides they most of 'em start out on. They 're like the two rails of a railroad; an' y' can't git off 'the regg'lar track, 'less y' upset altogether. It 's all saints, or all sinners; and the minister 's either got t' talk Zion with the perfessors, or brimstone 'n everlastin'—swear—with the unconverted. But Mr. Kingsworth, he 's all round. He says things that jest ketches either way, 'n y' can't tell whether it 's the saint-side or the sinner-side of y'u 't he 's got hold of. An' I don't see but what you 're jest the same, with y'r 'betweenness.' D' ye mean y' think everybody 's a between, an' there ain't no sheep, nor goats, nor nothin' settled?"

"I was n't talking about religion particularly," said France. "I meant," — and she quoted Miss Ammah's own definition, — "that everybody is between somebody and somebody else; to do some real service, I suppose, and fill some real place, or else they are not in any true place at all."

"*Air* you religious?" Sarell asked the tremendous question as if it were not tremendous at all. It might be a little delicate and personal; but personal questions are asked by the simple country-folk on all subjects of common relation and concern, of which the right-and-left in religion is as much one as the side in politics, or one's state in life, as single or married, town-dweller or country-dweller.

France had never been asked such a question before in all her life. She had hardly asked it of herself. She had supposed, or taken for granted she supposed, that she was on the same track with everybody else, — a track of gradual progress, which was to end in full enlightenment and, perhaps, righteousness. She had never taken her spiritual latitude and longitude under the noonday sun.

"I don't know," she answered briefly. "I don't know altogether what religion is."

And Sarell replied then quite simply, but yet more tremendously than before, "Oh well, you ain't then, of course," and immediately returned to the secular subjects under discussion, as if a certain practical freemasonry were established, and she could now quite freely and comfortably get forward with them.

"Well, a forty-nine-cent store ain't fairly between anything

's I can see, any more th'n a man with an extry pitchfork between two that 's a pitchin' an' a loadin' hay. It 's jest pertendin' a place, 'n ketchin' a few mean straws that drop on the way."

"I think you are quite right," said France.

"*I* tell him so," said Sarell complacently. "An' moreover, there 's his place up to Uncle Amb's where he 'd leave a actooil hole, bigger 'n he knows on; f'r 'f he did n't stay there — " But here, apparently, Sarell got a little ahead of her subject, and broke off, to go on with, " Y' see, Mis' Heybrook, she takes on 'bout my doing well. Well, ain't I, or would n't I, supposin'? He ain't not a great man, to be sure, say f'r takin' the lead; but, see here! ef you 'r agoin' t' hitch tandem, an' y'u *must* in this world, y' can't put *both* horses ahead, can y'u? I don't look out s' much f'r smartness in a man. A man wants t' be *stiddy;* a woman, round the house, with forty things runnin' one over the other's heels, she 's got to be smart; but a man, with only one regg'lar thing 't a time, c'n take it mod'rit. Now Hollis, he 's real *awnest* an' *innersunt*, f'r all his good clo'es 'n kind o' style; an' he c'n be *kep* stiddy. That 's what I want a man t' be, — stiddy an' awnest an' innersunt. The' ain't many of 'em innersunt, is ther', Miss France?"

France, not being able to answer for many of them, either way, did not answer at all. She only smiled, which she could not well help; and Sarell, with such encouragement, proceeded.

"Now, y' see, it 's best f'r him all ways t' keep on 't Uncle Amb's, an' spesh'lly 'cause 'v the ol' lady. 'F 't wa'n't f'r nothin' else, *I* sh'd hev t' go back there on account 'v her, f'r I don't b'lieve anybody but me 's got hold 'v the right string t' unsnarl things that 's got to be unsnarled. An' they 're all mixed up with this fem'ly, too, y' see: that 's where it clenches me. I don't care f'r nothin' else: 't might go t' grass, f'r me. But Uncle Amb, he 's the one Mr. Heybrook took the li'bility fer, that got this farm under morgidge. Ev'rybody don't know that, but I know it. But all the town b'lieves he 's got money now, an' I know where he 'd ought t' pay up. An' if anything happened, it 'd hev to be looked out fer. That ol' catamount, she 's watchin', layin' right by the hole; an' she 's a rubbin'

— 't ain't the finger-j'ints alone all that liniment goes onter, — an' she 's a limberin' herself; and you 'll see how bedrid she 'll be when the time comes. An' somebody 's got t' know *jest when she starts*. So I 'm bound t' keep on there, an' be farm-woman, whether Hollis is farmer or not, till it 's settled, ef I don't *never* live in a white house in a village, with green blinds to it, 'n a name on a door-plate!"

She had told all this for France's opinion upon it, of course. When France sat silent, a mere recipient, she urged her desire.

"Ain't I in the right on 't, don't you think? Ain't it a betweenness, 'cordin' t' you?"

"Possibly," returned France, with caution. "If you are sure about Mr. Bassett; caring for him, I mean."

"'V course I care f'r him. That 's jest what I mean t' do. He 's too good t' be throwed away."

"Only, yourself, Sarell. Are you sure you never would wish — "

"Folks can't be sure what they *never* would wish. *Never* means 'n all circumstahnces, 's much 's alwers, 'n y' don't *git* all circumstahnces 'n this world. Y' must take what comes t' y'u. What would y' do, 'f you 's in my place?" asked Sarell point-blank, seeing, perhaps, that she had too apparently closed the argument on her side.

"O Sarell, how can I tell? You see, I should n't be in your place, unless I were you; and then, of course, it would be you that would decide, not I, as it has to be now. I think least of all can one woman put herself in the place of another in these things."

"Well, I kinder wanted," said Sarell, "to tell it out to one o' my own sort, y' see. Mis' Heybrook, she 's old, and so 's Miss Ammah; an' I ain't got anybody that belongs t' me to go to, but what 's merried; an' ol' folks and merried folks *can't* put therselves 'n your place. They 've worked it out, 'n they know too much. Y'u want somebody that 's facin' the same way you be t' see your track: they can't by lookin' round over ther shoulders. 'F you sh'd undertake t' come out jest where they air, y' might git *clear* into the swamp!"

"Sarell, did you ever know two women handle their hair the same way exactly, even to make the same kind of a twist?"

"No; I've took notice o' that, an' it's queer, too."

"They don't handle their lives alike, any more; and yet every one of us is wanting substantially the same thing. I could n't twist up my hair your way, nor you mine."

"Wish 't I could," said Sarell. "Yourn alwers looks as if 't had curled round and fastened itself so, jest like a vine. Mine, — lor, it 's like a vine that 's ben tore down, an' can't be got up again, any way. The 's kinks enough, but they all turn contrary."

"Now we have come round to toilet matters, I wonder if there 's any place nearer than the river, where we could get some water to drink, and then wash our hands?"

"'V course, there 's a brook right here. Ther alwers is, in Fellaiden. Hark! Don't y' hear it, down below there, among the stones? We 'll go in a minute. I jest want t' ask y'u one thing more. What d' ye think I 'd best 'pear out with?"

"Peer out?" asked France, totally puzzled, and doing her mental spelling wrong.

"Yes, walk pride," said Sarell. "Don't they walk pride in the city? Fust Sunday, y' know. Louisy Huland, she had blue, so I can't. Pink 's pretty, but it don't go with my hair. An' green — well, a good, rich grass-green might do; only they 'd play ther jokes, some of 'em, may be, 'n say t I was green, sure enough; an' I ain't a goin' t' give 'em a handle aginst — nobody. I would n't *hev* him fust!"

Which was a right wifely spirit beforehand, France thought; and also perceived that the main question might be regarded as settled, without any responsibility of hers.

"You mean, appear as bride?" she said, laughing.

"Yes; walk pride," said Sarell. "They 've got it round t' that. Everybody says walk pride. Don't they in Boston?"

"I don't think they do. It goes without saying, there, perhaps; but not particularly the first Sunday of being married; that is, conspicuously, among nice people."

"Well, now you tell me jest what t' do, like the nice people, 'n I 'll do it. I 'll be genteel, even if Fellaiden folks don't know enough to know it. It 'll be a satisfaction t' my own mind."

"Why don't you wear brown? A deep, rich brown, with a sunny shade in it, to tone with your hair. It 's very becoming. And then, if it 's going to be cool weather, a brown hat and feather, or a brown velvet bonnet."

"White gloves?"

"Oh, no, indeed! Brown, just like your dress."

"My! *nothin'* white?"

"Nothing but your ruffles, and your pocket-handkerchief; and that must be in your pocket, if you want to be very nice."

"Sakes! it 's pocketin' everything. Ain't it kind o' every-day? You can't walk pride but once, y' know."

"I 'd do that in my pocket, or in my heart; and I 'd do it every day of my life, if I once began," said France.

"Y' *can* put y'rself int' my place, aft'r all," said Sarell.

But it was hardly into her place, as walking pride with Hollis Bassett.

Yet, as France has otherwise compared it, every woman must take her own road. It may be a longer road for Sarell Gately; yet who knows?

"'T won't be Tryphosy Clark that 'll hev the buyin' of it, nor yet the makin'," said the bride-elect, as she rose and led the promised way, brookward. "She dressmakes, or sets up to; an' she goes t' Reade, an' doos shoppin' arrants f'r folks. She went t' Boston once; an' she took arrants f'r pretty much the whole town. Her own come out o' the trimmins; parlor carpet 'n all, I guess; f'r she got one, an' she got the church carpet with the sewin' society money; an' if she was as good at lumpin' business as she was at a sep'rit job, she must 'a p'utty near made it out. She bought me a fifty-cent grennerdeen; fifteen yards; an' ther' was n't any change out o' ten dullars. That 's Tryphosy. That 's her betweenity. She 's exper'enced religion. But I would n't want her to pick it out f'r me, any more 'n another grennerdeen!"

Behind the pines, the slope of the knoll was hidden by the close, live laurel bushes, and by tangles of old stems of many that had been winter-killed, dry and brown, but showing such shooting lines of long, luxuriant growth, like water-lines of fountains, and crossing their fine upper branches in such deli-

cate screenwork, that to France's eyes they were part, and no small part, of the exquisite finish of the place, and not at all dead blemish. Sarell parted the green masses and broke away, with reckless hands, the tall, brittle stalks

"O, don't!" cried France. She would as soon have demolished the carved fretwork of some beautiful chapel. "You are making rubbish of it; and it was lovely, just as it stood!"

"Well, I declare! you do like brown things!" said Sarell. "But here 's the brook. Look here."

"Peer out?" asked France mischievously; and over Sarell's shoulder she literally peered.

A low, steep bank, slippery with pine needles; thick-growing shrubbery all along, on either hand, like that they had come through; over opposite, an unbroken hedge-line of it, except where a narrow opening showed a cattle-track to the clear water; the bend of the brook, right and left, burying itself in the sweet green mystery again; between, its musical, clear gurgle, and the cool shimmer and braid of scores of tiny falls and curls and eddies, with bubbling pools spreading wider here and there; the bed of it lovely-wild and broken with stones, and green, stately brakes and tender ferns crowding exuberant along its edges. It was a little water-world, hidden away here, utterly; they had not, — France had not, — known of it, sitting within a stone's throw.

"Why, one thing opens from another here, like fairy-land," she cried. "I wonder if we have n't got into a seven years' dream, in an elf-wood! I wonder if Heybrook Farm is anywhere about here, or we shall ever get back to it!" As she spoke she dipped her hands in the stream and tossed the drops up till they caught the sunlight, and fell back, glittering. Then she drank from her curved palm, the stintless flow freshening itself and bringing ever virgin waters, that she might wash, and drink, and wash again, at wayward pleasure.

"'Telling, telling, telling, all the while! Telling, telling, telling, as fast as I can; and yet they never guess half my beautiful secrets. Babble, babble, babble, but nobody comes or listens. All to myself, all to myself, this, and a hundred other places!' That 's what it says, Sarell; and it can hardly

say plain for laughing. O, the brook-songs are n't all written yet! but until there is another one," — and then, for pure glee, she broke forth with the never worn-out ripple, —

"I chatter, chatter, as I flow
To join the brimming river;
For men may come, and men may go,
But I go on forever — ever,
I go on forever!"

Her clear voice rang up above the accompaniment of the water, into the still air, through which it vibrated further than she knew.

"There 's one, now," Sarell said suddenly, in a low, quick tone, coming to her side.

"One what?" asked France, half startled, yet with no actual idea of anything more than a bird or a fish.

"One man, of course," said Sarell. "Comin' an' goin', sure enough. He don't act as though he meant to git anywheres. I saw him fust, five minutes ago, between the branches, stoppin' out there, at the turn. He was kinder lookin'; an' then he stepped across the stones an' went off, Thumble-woods way, I thought. Now, he 's back again."

"Sarell! Where?"

Sarell pointed to the right. "Out there," she said, "right where we 've ben a berryin'. It 's a wonder 'f he did n't hear you sing. 'F he 's stayin' round, — what 'll we do about it? An' there 's all our berries out there, too! It 's a mercy I tucked 'em under the birches!"

France turned a little pale. She was not used to meeting strange people in such broad solitudes. There was something fearful, suddenly, in the beautiful, secret place of the babbling brook; and a dread lay in the sweet chamber of the pines through which they must return. "You told me nobody ever came here," she said, with a scared reproach.

"No, I did n't; for here we are ourselves," said Sarell. "An' I s'pose he 's got jest as good a right. Only, somehow, I felt 's if we 'd spoke the place to-day. I 've ben alone here, fifty times."

"If I had n't sung that ridiculous song!" thought France.

But she determined not to give words or way to any precipitate panic.

"Was he a working-man — or a gentleman — or a *tramp?*" She began her questioning with a determined calmness; but at the last unwilling syllable her whisper fainted to a breath across her lips.

"Why, I tell y'u, I could n't see. He just looked — black."

"*Black?*"

"I don't mean the *man.* His figger, — against the light, y' know, an' through the criss-cross of the branches. Lor! the' ain't nothin' t' take on about. *He* warn't anybody; an' he 's off b' this time, I dassay."

These remarkable and contradictory assumptions failed to reassure Miss Everidge; but she crept mechanically after her companion, who parted the laurels cautiously, and they re-entered the pine parlor.

"How *shall* we ever get away again?" France besought.

"My *gracious!*" answered Sarell, with a great and sudden emphasis, that shook off all possible connection with what she seemed to reply to. She made a spring forward, in which France checked her by a peremptory grasp.

"The river, the dam! They 've shut the water-gate. They 've stopped the mill f'r somethin'! Now we *air* caught. F'r you can't ever walk three miles, through Thumble woods!"

Sarell was in earnest, now; she had been half manufacturing a fright before. She rushed from France's loosing hold, down the winding glade-way into the open.

France stood an instant, the growing thunder of the water in her ears. Then, of inevitable necessity, she followed on.

"There 's y'r brimmin' river! I should think so!" said Sarell, pointing to the swelling volume of the falling flood. "They ain't done that in five years, afore. An' I heared the mill-whistle, too; an' never thought but 'twas the railroad. They let it off when we was on the upland there, beyond the oaks, — an' hour ago; my head had n't nothin' but huckleberries in it — an' we 've ben foolin' round, jest as contented! Well, we *may* content ourselves now."

It was something grand to see, — the leap of the full stream

to its old channel. Already it was rushing, in white foam, hither and thither, between the rocks, finding its old ways afresh. It was like the return of a strong, glad brotherhood to a birthplace; searching out swiftly, with shouts, the places they knew and had been kept away from, and filling them with their rejoicing life again.

The broad, down-spilling sheet was silvery in the sun, where the naked timber had lain across, and behind it the repressed flood had waited. The mill-pond — wide, but held between defined, ledgy banks, and with a back run of only that rod or two, — had risen quickly. It was full of water, and for half a mile back of the little fall the current was swift, pressed in between the foot of the Oak Ridges and the steep flank of Fellaiden Hill. Above that it broadened, and lay in a lovely, safe, interval reach; its hidden bed, perhaps, being formed against a checking incline, where Fellaiden Hill dropped its east-lying buttress gently northward.

A great, continuous avalanche of sound had burst upon, and possessed, the stillness of the remote, hushed woodland.

The mill-people — all but those who were busied by whatever necessity of change or repair had obliged the stop — had gone away already through the village. There was no one to whom to sign or call; there was no way anywhere, but up through the long, dense forest that lay around the foot of Thumble, or over the steep spur-cliff that separated these wide-enclosed pastures from the other side of the mill-hollow and the highway beyond the bridge.

The man, whom for a moment they had forgotten, was nowhere to be seen.

The two girls stood there, scarce thinking, when they did recollect, whether to be glad or sorry for this.

There were other glades which ran in among the pine-trees; through some one of these, the intruder, caught, doubtless, as they were, by the over-flow of the dam, had, after his reconnoissance which aroused Sarell's questionings, apparently taken his final way toward and over the brook, and along some wood-path.

"Shall we holler?" asked Sarell, first to consider advisabilities.

"And bring that man back? No, indeed!" exclaimed France. "What good would that do?"

"We sh'll want some help out o' this — or you will. It 'll be p'utty late b' time either o' the boys 'll come along t' the bar-place, 'n then c'n git back t' the little crossin', 'n down through the woods this side. They won't think o' comin' f'r us t'll mos' sundown. They 're up 'n the turnpike lot, 'n I told 'em we wanted t' have all day."

"I don't care. I 'll wait. But what will they do then?" France spoke purposely in that incorrect impersonal plural.

"O, 'f 't 's *they*, they c'n do most anything. 'F 't 's only *he*, — well, he 'll do something. A man alwers can. He 's bound to, 'f he can't. P'raps he 'll fetch a hatchet, 'n git a log, or some birches, across somewheres. The' ain't but one real wide place under the dam. But we don't want it t' take all night, y' see. Y' better lemme sing out, 'fore it 's too late."

But at that moment, a clear, strong shout rang up above the noise of the water. It came from somebody by the brookside, among the pine thickets.

"Hil — lo!" it sounded, first. And then followed, distinctly, the syllables, "Miss Fr — ance!"

France put up a little agate whistle that somebody had brought her from Chamouny, and that hung, as a charm, from her watch-chain. As she blew a shrill note, Sarell added, in almost as shrill a soprano, "Here, we 're here!" choosing, woman-fashion, the vowel of least possible sonorousness to shout on. And as she said hurriedly, "It must be Flip Merriweather, come over the Instrup, an' goin' up pickerel fishing," France, watching the line of pines, saw somebody break quickly through a cover of high laurels, and then Bernard Kingsworth, crashing the fern-bushes with long steps toward her.

"O, I am so glad it 's *you!*" she cried, and sprang to meet him.

Bernard Kingsworth looked glad. No wonder, not knowing the reason of that emphasis.

France, unconscious, shook her head restrainingly at Sarell behind his shoulders, as she walked back over the slope with him to where they had been standing. She would not have him know her girlish fright at him.

"This is a strange adventure for us all," she said, her quietness and reserve coming back with reassurance.

"No. It 's only a predicament," said Sarell concisely. Her self-possession, if she had ever really lost it, had returned also. She stood idly stripping a tall bush beside her, her mouth already full again of fruit. "We may as well pick our blackberries now, though."

She began to gather oak-leaves and to spread them over the blueberries in the basket.

"Ther 's room f'r two quarts there, an' the two pails 'll be two more, besides your basket, France. We could n't kerry any more, anyway; an' we 'll pile the rest up in the pine pantry, t' be fetched to-morro'."

"I should like to know how we 're to be fetched ourselves, first," said France.

"The 's boats," said Sarell; "an' p'raps they 'll start the mills agin, 'fore night. An' there 's the Instrup path." She was full of potentials now. A man might and should, as well as could, do anything. It was his business and his lookout, as soon as he was there: she was there to pick berries.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POWER AND THE PARTS.

"I HAD just come over what Sarell calls the 'Instrup' path," said Mr. Kingsworth. "I believe they call it so from 'Instep,' the join of the foot-hill to the ankle-curve, as it might be, of Thumble. I was coming up through the woods from the village; I saw the water rising when I first came out into the open pasture above in view of it; I walked down this way just to watch it, as it crept up to the brim, and went over; then I thought I heard a sound of voices in the wood, and turned back again toward the brook. I knew whoever might be here would have something of a tramp out again either way, and that they might have come and been hemmed in precisely as has happened with you. Of course, I did not dream it could be you, until I heard you sing."

"But you never heard me sing before," France answered with surprise.

"No, I never did," said Bernard Kingsworth. He did not ask her why, since in the hymns at church so many voices joined unhesitatingly; neither did he say, or quite account for it to himself, that the tones of her voice, that should have been strange to him, had yet not been, even for a single second, strange at all.

"It is very well you are not in haste," he went on, glancing at Sarell, who was pushing her path through high tangles a little apart from them, — picking her way, in the literal sense of blazing a line through the fruit-laden vines by stripping them of their juicy burden as she went. "You will have to wait here some time, in any case. Could you walk half a mile, or a little more, with safety, do you think, Miss France?"

France was confident in the affirmative.

"It will be rough, but — with assistance — I am glad I happened to come this way to-day."

Something in the slight hesitation, the choice of an impersonal phrase, instead of a direct offer or assurance of his own help, and in the tone in which the word "glad" escaped him, might have carried sign to speaker, if not to hearer, of that which was coming to be what the Scotch call "by-ordinar" in the interest of their association.

Whether it did or not, France asked quietly, without repeating what she had already said impetuously in the first relief of meeting him, "Is there any choice of resource for us? You said 'in any case.'"

And Bernard replied as instantly, "Yes; I was going on to say there are several things to be thought of." He took out his watch. "It is now after half past two o'clock. At any time after five, I suppose, they may come for you. They were to come for you, of course?"

"Yes," France said, "to the barplace over the dam. Lyman drove us down there this morning."

Mr. Kingsworth nodded. He knew the ways of the place, and had easily divined the whole situation. "Then they will have left home before you can reach there. I think the first thing must be to notify them."

France exclaimed, "If we could do that, we could get there?" Her exclamation ended interrogatively.

"Not of necessity. To get you there, I must send to them, or do what will occupy as much time. One of the Heybrooks could come down with a boat from the little crossing. Israel used to have one there, I think; or, Philip Merriweather keeps a skiff somewhere about on the river, and I could find it or him, perhaps. If I go over the 'Instrup' I shall accomplish both, possibly; in which case the whole party, fruit-cargo and all, may be conveyed by water. But you will have to walk the half mile to safe navigation."

He had not said that if one only of the little boats could be procured his own course would be on foot, after all those hours, with his extra climb to be added, in the deepening evening, the whole long way to North Fellaiden.

"I can walk quite well; I shall like it," said France. "But must you go away?" There was some reluctant remonstrance in her inquiry. He could not know, since it had been of her own free pleasure to come here for all day, that she felt any newly roused timidity at remaining without protection.

"I would rather stay, of course," he answered, smiling. "But that would not achieve anything. I had better address myself at once to the 'Instrup.' I shall dispatch a messenger from the village, and then look for Phil at the doctor's."

"Flip's jest as likely t' turn up here," put in Sarell, whose moth-path of picking had come round beside them. "He's alwers off on some tramp. He 'll either be comin' over the 'Instrup' himself, to go up t' the crick f'r pick'rel, or he 'll be goin' back agin, 'f he 's been a'ready. 'Less he 's way up Thumble agin, an' then ther 'll be no use, anyway."

"Except in sending for Rael," said the minister, "which is my clear duty at present; in doing which, the other may happen also, as I have been explaining to Miss Everidge. If Phil appears this way from anywhere, you must intercept and keep him."

"I ain't 'gzac'ly frettin' after Flip Merriweather, to incept nor to keep him, neither one," said Miss Gately, with a spice of scorn, and some confusion of Latin compounds of the verb "to take." But she did not say it to the minister; he had lifted his hat, and disappeared in the bushy pathway that would take him toward the Instrup.

Mr. Kingsworth was gone more than an hour. It was a good half hour's work to cross the Instrup path.

France had lost the enthusiasm of berrying; besides which, she felt the wisdom, as Sarell suggested, of "savin' up her strength t' git home with." She tried to read a little, while Sarell picked on alone; then she put by the book, and tried her wool-work. Sketching she had no mind for; she could not fix herself to the study of any scrap of her great surroundings, while the whole, from the towering height of craggy, pine-scrawled Thumble to the wide plunge of the river, and its ravine of rocks and foam below, drew and widened her gaze, and strained it with the sense of thronging grandeur and beauty.

Before long she had rolled up her canvas and wools again, and folded her hands to watch and wait.

No Phil appeared. But something else appeared, climbing over Thumble, — a surge of beautiful cloud; white, at first, in the strong sunlight; then, as light drifts of vapor floated and gathered, westerly, and lay between it and the descending sun, it turned gray and heavy; and other piles reared up, above the black hills, north and eastward, slowly climbing, driven from the south, up the valleys on the further side.

"That 's a thunder-head," observed Sarell, tipping her hat back to look up. "'F it spills over the crown this side, we sh'll hev it. But it may go up north."

For the last half hour of Mr. Kingsworth's absence, France sat watching the thunder-head.

Bernard Kingsworth watched it also, as he hurried back over the Instrup. He was beginning to be anxious; for neither had he found Phil Merriweather. They had only to wait for Rael Heybrook, — making their own way through the heavy woods, meanwhile, to where he could take them up; and this threatening tempest rearing its menace at them from beyond the mountain.

"But there is always a way out," he said to himself; and repeated it to France Everidge, when she came a second time, eagerly, and with apprehensive words, to meet him.

"Here, Miss Sarell," she called cheerily, as they turned together to where that young woman stood intrenched. "I 've brought a basket for your extra berries."

"Well, there, now!" she ejaculated; "ef you ain't a master one f'r thinkin' 'v ev'rything! *I* thought of it, 's soon 's you was gone."

"And sent the thought after me, probably. Thoughts do travel, — and accomplish their errands, — if we did but know, and could believe."

"That black cloud travels," said France, looking upward, "and drops; it is drawn over the ridge now, like a cap."

"Then we 've got it, sure enough," said Sarell.

"We are between the river and the storm," said France. And the storm answered her with a far-off growl of thunder.

The girl shuddered, quite inwardly and to herself, she thought; for she would not senselessly shiver or bemoan; but Bernard Kingsworth perceived it.

"There 's always a way out," he said again, with that bright smile of his.

It lifted her dread just enough, with its persistent heartening, to set her thought free for a question.

"I don't see how you can say that," she said. "People do not always have a way out, and why should we? There was no way out at Ashtabula or at Revere."

"Are you sure?"

She understood the significance. "Only by the chariots of fire. We do not want to go that way."

"No. We are not meant to want to. But when the chariots come for *us*, — we shall see that they *are* chariots!"

I have not said, perhaps, that Bernard Kingsworth was a plain man. You would not have thought of it, except when the brightness of his nature — the sudden shining of some great thought or feeling of it — transfigured him; and then you would have wondered where your vision was, that you had not seen the open glory in his face before.

He stood now with his hat off; his walk over that steep path had been a warm and hurried one; the quick wind that began to flow over the top of Thumble, like the water over the dam, as that urging current which brings a summer storm, rushed up along its great southward precipice, swept the brown waves of his hair from the broad serenity of his brow; and his eyes, lifted to the hills, whence the fear might come for others, looked almost visibly into the Face of his Strength.

France had a strange, thrilled feeling, that might be like what they felt who stood around when "Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven," and straightway, out of his own abiding-place, came down the bread-blessing, so that their souls were fed — the healing, so that their bodies were made whole — the peace, that overwhelmed their fear — the life, that quickened them in the very graves, and called them forth. Something more than the gift of the moment — that by which the gift was made possible — came to them, with the Christ and his open

heaven by their side. Something of that comes by human contact when any human soul stands — in the blessed order — between another and the great Light. The spirit makes, then, not a shadow, but a translucence, which is the shadow of the land that hath no need of the sun.

Something of this shadow fell, like the "shadow of the wings," upon Frances Everidge. It was good for her to be there. She was not afraid of the storm any longer.

Her own face calmed and lit up, and repeated into his what it had caught from it. They two met upon a plane, at that moment, where there is nothing to hinder.

This man had a great gift for her. She recognized that. In that upper region of her life, she hailed him joyfully. There were many things she would fain have asked of him. Her heart warmed, standing by his side. But it was the heart of the angel, that was to grow in her, not the heart of the woman, who was not an angel yet, and who would choose as a woman chooses, by some divine instinct, yet an instinct moving upon the earthside of her, albeit from out the heavenly. There are "discrete degrees" in all things. We love, as we think, in different altitudes. I do not distinguish now as between high love and baser passion. I speak of pure, true things. There is a love which would not dare, or wish, to appropriate. Women have loved men so, with something of that pure enthusiasm with which the Maries loved the Lord. Would he have walked with women so, and given so much of his gospel through the hearts of women, if that love had not been possible? How it may be with mere common men, I do not know. Perhaps the danger is that the altitude may be a transient one, on both sides.

With Frances Everidge, as we have had some glimpse before, there was an absolute, strange impatience of the lower level — the intimacy of every day — with Bernard Kingsworth. It came largely, thus far, from a subtile, resistent jealousy of that which, to ordinary apprehensions, gave him the better chance with her. Because they were the only young man and young woman in Fellaiden of the same outward type and standing, because in this way, in spite of themselves, they con-

trasted obviously, perhaps, with these other fine, bright, capable, honorable, innately-delicate, *all* except world-polished and world-alloyed, young persons, — she would not, even in commonest ways, be paired off with him.

France would put her thought in the plural, when she multiplied her adjectives in her mental judgments and indignant comparisons; but it was scarcely that she thought of Sarell or of Flip Merriweather, or even of Lyman Heybrook, mere unformed boy that he was. It was of the man in the black coat, and the man in the white shirt-sleeves, with his milk-pails, whom she had set over against each other that first afternoon which had brought the three of them together before the sublime measures of that "altar in the midst of the land of Egypt," and whom she balanced against each other still, with a resentment against the absent world — her world — because she knew it would gauge the two so differently. She held herself back from the personal attraction of Bernard Kingsworth, lest she herself should be letting the world-measures sway her. She was so determined to despise them, that she almost measured Bernard Kingsworth's broadcloth and his education against him.

And all the while, that other inconsistent resentment had been working in her, against herself, because of something half-conscious that she would not wholly look at, not being yet able to look at it with the braving of the world within herself that she had arrogated.

How it would have been with all this if she had not begun here, with the persuasion that the nobly-anomalous young farmer-gentleman thought her "too fine to be fit to comprehend," — how it would have been if she had known Bernard Kingsworth before she had comprehended Rael Heybrook, — how it might yet be, if this summer episode were passed, and other days were come, with other growth in her, and other shaping circumstance, — does not belong to this paragraph or chapter, or even to the whole story, the story itself being but a paragraph, after all, as all our human stories are; full of temporary contradiction and half solution; comprehensible altogether only to the one Author and Reader. While this is

so, we shall go on criticising, from these same half views, each other's stories and our own lives.

When Mr. Kingsworth turned to France again, how could he help seeing the light in her face? and how could he know how his own had shone? It began to be a lovely hour to him. For this hour, he alone could care for her. The rest of the world was put off by a wide circumference. They were hemmed in here, with just enough of an anxiety to draw them close; an anxiety that it was his task to reassure her in, and to turn aside.

But you will mistake — and I shall, if I leave you time to mistake in — if you suppose that there was any mooniness in Bernard Kingsworth that would waste a minute with the sentiment that made his task a thing to be thankful for that it was his, which was needful for the action that the opportunity imposed; or that his belief was of any sort that would let him stand believing, while the deed of faith waited.

What waited now — or what were not left to wait — were the merest measures of practical good sense. He looked carefully at the weather-signs; he noted for a minute or two longer the drift and climb of those cloud-masses; then he said, "It will be here in a few moments, whatever we are to have of it. But I think it will be only the fringe of the storm. We are better here than we should be in the low woods. Miss Sarell, we shall want those shawls; and you had better make haste with your berries."

Sarell, determined upon filling her fifth measure of blackberries, was picking till the last minute. She left the plan of campaign and the word of command to others. Now she turned, with surprise. "Shawls?" she said; "we ain't got any. There 's France's waterproof, that 's all." But Mr. Kingsworth came to her, uncovered the basket he had brought, and drew forth two woollen shawls, which he had borrowed in the village.

"Well, if you don't beat the Dutch! Is the' anything inside the *shawls?*"

Mr. Kingsworth laughed, and answered by putting France inside one of them, then laid the other upon Sarell's disregarding shoulders. That young woman was stooping, finishing

thoroughly the thing she came for, whatever the winds and the clouds might have come for since. She emptied her heaped pail, and dexterously turned the contents of its mate, to which she had improvised a tall continuation of birch-bark cylinder, into the additional receptacle; tied a "tin kittle" to the bail of each basket, bestowing therein the smaller articles that had been auxiliary to their lunch; then, just as a wild whirl of wind brought with it some great, smiting drops of rain, she thrust them under some juniper-bushes in a cradle-hollow, gathered the shawl more firmly about her, and hurried after France and the minister.

Mr. Kingsworth led them into a deep little covert, discerned and resolved on by himself within three minutes, between an overshelving rock, that made a partial roof for them upon its leeward side, and a thick, hedgy group of scrubby pasture cedars. Against the rock itself grew birches, strong and lithe; from these to the cedars, underneath the shelter of the branches, Mr. Kingsworth was stretching and fastening, one way and another — with its own buttons and buttonholes, some pins of twigs and a bit of cord — France's large waterproof. Under this little tent they all gathered, seating themselves upon dry knolls of turf and moss; and instantly the storm broke.

First, wind; that came raging over the foot-hill, bending the trees, and whitening its path across the upland with turning the pale undersides of grass and fern and little birch-shrubs, as it smote them level; tearing a great fringe of cloud from the flank of Thumble, to pour it down in shot-like rain, with wide spaces between the drops. Then a fierce descent of driven waters, in tense, slanting lines, rushing, unbroken from the discharging heavens, to bury themselves like lances in the earth. Then a quick, arrowy flash, and a simultaneous peal of thunder.

France involuntarily laid her hand upon Mr. Kingsworth's arm. "Oh! is it safe here?" she whispered, as if the lightning, like a robber, might hear, and break in upon them.

"It is where we are put," answered Mr. Kingsworth, with the cheer of a child of the Father in his voice. And again the

sense of childlikeness and rest came over her, because he had it.

She withdrew her hand, and folded it, with the other, in her lap. If he had looked at her, he would have seen, even in the dimness, that her face flushed. But he did not look or move, or notice that movement of hers. A different man might have taken the hand, with some soothing word; but he knew it was not laid there for him to take. His face was from her, and he did not turn. I think the very thrill of the touch kept him motionless. Bernard Kingsworth, in all his grown-up manhood, had not known the close companionship or sweet, dependent intimacy of mother, sister, or — was *this* woman ever to be that? — dear woman friend. The brief clinging of the fingers, where a woman's fingers had never clung before, sent the unframed asking, with the instant respecting sense of its mere involuntariness, through heart and brain.

"And I think this is the best place," he went on, as if there had been no pause, as indeed there scarcely had been, except in that realm that is without time, — where the pauses are of inward event. "Among the tall pines, or under any of these groups of scattered oaks, it would hardly have been wise to take shelter. But here, — see how we are nestled in among the bits of birch and the ferns, and all the little lowly things that are too lowly to be hurt. See how the wind and the rain drive off from us, following the slant of the rock. Your cloak will be hardly wet. The storm itself roofs us over. I feel very safely put by, Miss France!"

"You make me feel very sure of *your* safety," France answered, smiling, as he now turned to her. "And — ours — is inseparable from it, I hope!" She had come near forgetting Sarell, and saying "mine." It was not altogether the self-rebuking of self that checked her.

The wind and rain slackened; the burst of the shower was over; a little bird gave a solitary note. "It will soon be past; it is only the skirt of the cloud, as I told you," said Mr. Kingsworth.

Sarell sat near the tent-opening, where the corner of the waterproof hung down from a cedar bush a little way from the

rock, the shrubs shutting them in thickly on all the other sides of their hiding-place. At this moment she startled them suddenly.

"Se-e he-ere!" she shouted; again in that ridiculous feminine way, high-pitching her voice, and straining it on the miserable closed vowel. "Phil — lu-up!"

That did better; there came back a man's "Hallo!" and Phil Merriweather, on his way down the hill, turned, and presented himself before the opening, through which Sarell's head and shoulders were thrust out into the rain.

"Fill up!" he repeated. "I should say things *were* filling up, pretty well! How came you here?" The last four words were overwhelmed by five from Sarell uttered at the same moment.

"Where did *you* drop from?" She demanded it as if she had hailed him from pure curiosity.

"Is that all you want to know? Down Thumble,— with the rest of the family."

"*Fam'ly?*"

"Yes; the Merry-weathers. Don't I look like it?" From the sloping thatch of his wide straw hat, which he and the wind were still clutching at together, to the rolled-up hems of his trousers, he stood there dripping, like a kelpie. "Now it's my turn. What are *you* here for?"

"T' fill up berry-baskets. An' it's done. Now, we want t' git home agin."

"*We?* Who else?"

"France Everidge and the minister."

"Thunder!" said Flip Merriweather.

"No, Mr. Kingsworth,— you keep dry. I'll do the talkin'," Sarell parenthesized easily, over her shoulder. "I ain't said much before, when 't warn't no use. *Thunder?*" she went on, her face to Flip and the outer world again, and ignoring the restraint of any listening behind her. "Yes; an' the rain comin' down like choppin'-knives, fit t' make surrup 'v all them blackb'ries, beforehand; an' a mile 'r tiew 'v woods — accordin' — gitt'n wet 'n slipp'ry for the way out; an' all that load t' kerry; an' th' aft'noon a goin'; an' we sitt'n here under the bushes, caught in this dam scrape!"

Flip whooped in ecstasy at the climax of her rehearsal, given in her usual cheerful flow and tone.

"Well, I say!" he shouted. "You 'do the talkin'' tall, for the minister!" And the minister and France laughed, irresistibly, behind her.

Sarell — *sibi conscia recti* — kept both tone and countenance. "Now you 're caught too, though, it 's all right," she concluded, with careless equanimity.

"Oh, thank you! Well, what do you propose?" Flip took off his straw hat as he spoke, and flapped the rain from it, shook himself generally, and reduced himself from the pouring to the simply drenched condition. Mr. Kingsworth had come forth now, notwithstanding Sarell's remonstrance, and was shaking hands with him.

France came and looked over Sarell's shoulder from the opening. The scattered lines of raindrops were glittering already as they fell, in the forth-stealing sunshine. They seemed to gather themselves up, shrinking cloudward, as they ceased. "O, how pretty it is!" France exclaimed. "And how strange and quick it all was!"

But Miss Gately never dropped the thread of conversation, now that she had taken it up. "We propose boats," she answered Phil. "Yourn, f'r one, now you 've come. Where is it?"

"Up the creek."

"Land!"

"No. It 's water. Creeks are, generally. I came down to skip over here," he explained to Mr. Kingsworth, "to save the Instrup. And there was the dam! I mean it was n't. It *is* going to stop raining. They 've got it hard up Sudley way, though,— hail. A black cloud went over there like a land-slide. Now, I 'll tell you. I can 't be any wetter. The sun 's coming out, and half an hour of shine 'll make *your* way all comfortable. It has n't soaked much into the deep woods, this side. I 'll take your berries and go along. I 'll have my boat down to the mouth of the creek in less than an hour, and I 'll wait there till you come. Where 's your baskets?"

"I 'll git 'em," said Sarell, pushing forward; but the two men

stopped her. "They're back there, under some junipers, in a holler."

"I see," said Flip. "When a woman tramps through the bushes she leaves trail enough. You keep still."

Flip was in his element. He was the man of the occasion. He came back with a big basket in either hand, as Mr. Kingsworth unfastened the waterproof, and drew it carefully away from over France's head. She was so warm, she said, she wanted a breath of that delicious, rain-washed air.

"You said 'boats,'" said Flip. "We *shall* want more than my little canoe, if we 're all to go. Where 's Rael's? You can row, Mr. Kingsworth, if we can get that."

"I have sent word up to the farm. Somebody will come down," said Mr. Kingsworth.

"He 's ben over the Instrup," volunteered Sarell, seeing Flip's stare. "You ain't the only one."

"Nobody is," said Mr. Kingsworth.

"There, now; there 's the betweenities, agin!" said Sarell. "You go, Flip; your piece is between here an' the crick."

"I call *that* a clear prov'dunce, now; an' I 'm free t' confess it," she said, as Flip went off.

Mr. Kingsworth was spreading the waterproof on the dry side of another group of rocks, in the fresh, open air. "In contradistinction to what?" he asked, hearing Sarell's words.

"Things in gener'l. You don't think everything 's a prov'dunce, do you, Mr. Kingsworth?"

"Everything, if anything. Miss France, here is a safe seat. You will be tired standing, and the grass is wet. We must give the sun a half hour, Philip said. Miss Sarell, where does your providence begin and end?"

France had taken the place he had made for her, and called Sarell to another, which the ample cloak also covered. Mr. Kingsworth stood leaning on the tall ash stick which had served him for a climbing-staff. He looked straight into Sarell's face, expecting an answer.

The girl, put to her definitive, considered an instant, and then said, "I suppose where the' ain't anything else."

"I think so, too. Therefore, everywhere, and in all things, and enduring for ever. Otherwise, what is 'providing'?"

"Look here, Mr. Kingsworth. You asked me, an' so I 'll say. I think things *is* p'ovided, gener'lly; an' folks is p'ovided, partially, with common sense; an' then they two, or the sum totle of 'm, is set t' work, an' a spesh'l prov'dunce don't set in, t'll they 're used up. I don't think Prov'dunce troubles itself with ev'ry little puttickl'r thing. But then, I ain't regen'rit; nor no ain't France," she added, intrenching herself against possible individual ministration.

Mr. Kingsworth smiled. "Did you pick all those berries 'generally,' or every particular one?" he asked her.

"Well, I d' know. A good many tumbled in together, off one branch, when I shuck it, sometimes. An' I suppose that 's how they grew. Ef th' Lord said, 'Let the' be huckleberry-bushes,' then the' was huckleberry-bushes, was n't ther? An' he don't stop, after that, creatin' 'em all sep'rit, doos he?"

A look in France's face, as she listened, with something too interiorly interested for a smile, did not escape Mr. Kingsworth. He answered Sarell.

"I have seen you knit," he said; "and I don't think you paid regard, apparently, to stitches. The needlefuls ran off as if you hardly even thought of them; and the work, as a whole, grew. But I suppose you will not say that there was no touch or movement of your fingers for each separate stitch? or, so, the whole would never be there."

"Of course. But I sh'd be all wore out 'f I had t' pick up, 'n put over, 'n pick through, an' *re'lize* it, ev'ry single one, 's I did when I fust learnt. I should n't ever knit a stockin', let alone a two-an'-a-ha'af-yard quilt."

"Yes; we are small, and easily overcome by the multitude of small things. But 'the Lord of the whole earth fainteth not, neither is weary.' That is our greatest way of thinking of Him. His power goes into the least making, the least holding up. And his knowledge and joy go also. He means it all, as we cannot endure to mean it. His Spirit 'goes with the word, and with it is the word made perfect.'"

"Prob'ly I sh'll see it all when I 'm c'nverted," said Sarell.

"Or perhaps, as you begin to see something of it, you will be converted. 'Are being converted,' would be saying it more

rightly; for we all see something; and they who see most need turning more and more toward the light. It takes a great deal to bring us face to face."

"I like folks that 'll 'low folks t' see somethin', 'thout stoppin' 'em t' make 'em show their ticket," said Sarell. "An' I don't want to conterdick, neither. But the way I see now is that things is p'utty much done in the lump. 'S I make bread, now. Why, when I was very little, I uset t' think 't my mother made a loaf o' bread the way the ants make an ant-hill, pilin' it up, one speck at a time. An' th't one piled it light, 'n another piled it soggy; 'n I could n't see how they made it hold, anyway, or got time. But now, I jest take ha'af a peck o' flour, an' I mix it, an' I work it, an' set it t' rise, 'n I bake it; an' the specks take care of themselves, an' there 't is, 'cordin' t' the natur' of it. All I handled was the lump. An' the world looks jes' so, once the natur' of it 's made; an' I can't see it no other ways."

"All you handled was the lump," repeated Mr. Kingsworth. "*Something* handled the particles; something handled their relation to each other; something handled the fire, and the heat of it. Something took care of all that you brought, rudely, together. Some might was alive in what you call the nature of it, and worked, meekly, obediently, alongside, underneath, beyond, your working. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' The great power takes the infinitesimal part. That is the greatness, the infinity."

"Men do not reckon that way," said France after a pause. "A man who transacts a great business does not hamper himself with the details, and he is looked upon as great just in proportion as he can scheme and organize grandly, and delegate the particulars; carrying the whole plan and purpose only in his own mind."

"Precisely; because, as I said, in our littleness, *forced* to give up details, we invert the truth, and come to think of the outline as greater than the filling up; of our thought of things as actually holding them. The merchant or the general would be the greater who did *not* have to depute. But we were speaking, at first, of Providence; of intent and ruling in the

things that happen. Don't you see, Miss France, that the real inclusion of the less in the greater is the including of what we call results or exceptional occurrences in the infinite and eternal working of the numberless continual causes and sequences that we can never trace? Don't you see, Miss Sarell," turning to her with a definite illustration, as it occurred to him that he was lapsing into a phraseology and abstraction that might be all quite overhead to his simpler auditor, "that it is a more wonderful thing that God should have taken care, with all the complications of all things else, from the very beginning of things, from the making and succession of all winds and rains, and in all the human lives and happenings till this very moment, that help and sparing should come to us in this very little need of ours, than it would have been if He had interfered with an afterthought instead of a forethought, and turned things and people *out* of what we call their natural course? Is n't it a greater providing that He should have made it in the order of things that the rain should stop, and that Philip should come this way rather than the other; but should have so ordered that order, that it should play exactly right for us, without working disorder for anything else?"

"What if it had not happened right, as we call it, for us?" said France.

"Then it would have been right, as we should have seen it presently," said Mr. Kingsworth. "The happenings are never ended with what we call either right or wrong."

"But there is natural law," said France, "that we can break, or run against, and that Providence won't break, or turn aside from. And then, there is that question about asking; that can make no difference, they say, because of law. They are always telling us about those things, now."

"They stop short in the telling," said Mr. Kingsworth, "they leave out — just the providence. That the breakings and the repentings and the askings are all foreseen and provided for. 'Before they call I will answer.' The answer has been laid up from that first 'ever.'"

France glanced inquiringly.

"'The kingdom and the power, for ever *and* ever.' Away

back in what we call done with and we cannot alter, but in what the Lord has never taken his hand from. 'Yesterday, to-day, and forever'; that is the word and the Christ. We ask back into the Past when we ask help and forgiveness. And He is there, the Same."

"Does what we do, then, not matter?"

"'Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!' It matters everything. The grace may have to abound 'to the uttermost,' through consequence that we call retribution, to time of which we say 'forever.'"

"And yet, anywhere, it can be turned for the asking? *That* seems like reversing, — interfering. They tell us we can be really saved from nothing; that to stop a drop of water out of its natural course would be to bring on a convulsion of worlds."

"Only what they call 'natural course' is but the little piece of one straight line that they can see. God works at the whole diagram. Miss France, you taught me 'patience' the other day. Under certain rules we worked out the result we wanted. If there had been no rules, where would have been the beauty, the power, the interest? God makes to himself rules, and in these he does *all* things."

"But the rules do hinder 'patience' from coming out at all, sometimes."

"Because we can neither invent perfect rules nor play all the possibilities perfectly. God can. His Patience is an Infinite Game."

"A *game?*"

"That seems to you a light word? I used it with its fullest intent. 'Game,' traced back, is 'gaman,' — joy; traced further back, is 'kam,' — to love," said Mr. Kingsworth.

"In a game," said Sarell, who listened with her own rough common sense, caught what she could, and applied according to the previous preparation of her own mind, "*something* beats an' something *gits* beat, alwers. Now I'd jest ike to ask you, Mr. Kingsworth, 'cause I ain't religious, what some of us is jest put here t' git beat for? The game — you said we might say so — would n't be anything athout two sides to it. Ain't it p'utty clever in us, after all, t' keep up the sinner side so 's 't the saints may hev it out, an' hev the best of it?'

"If the game could possibly be against any human souls, and the prize of the calling could possibly be an exulting of escape and contrast," said the minister; "but the Everlasting Providence is the grand and perfect ordering of all souls, and for them, — just where they will be. We may be in the line of the conquering harmony, or we may be in that which opposes a seeming hindrance or disorder. We *must* be in the one or the other, for we all work in line, each in his place, upward or downward. We are all kings and priests in the lineage of our power and in the order of our consecration. We all, for good or for evil, do both 'pray' and 'preach'; '*make known*,' that is, both ways; as we declare our want, and give on, declaring ourselves again as we have received. We are between powers and powers by every act. And our doing comes back to us, in the fulfilment of other doing, from above or from below us. We may move angels; we may move devils; and we move ourselves, by the same force, toward our joining with either. That is the awfulness and the blessedness of living."

"Did you mean all that by your 'betweenness,' France?"

"You have given us a beautiful sermon, Mr. Kingsworth," said France, passing by Sarell's question.

"Have I? I did not mean it as a discourse. But if it has been a sermon in the sense of a true joining of a truth to an apprehension, I am glad that we have apprehended together. Will you tell me what Miss Sarell means by your word, — the 'betweenness'?"

"It was not my word exactly. It was Miss Ammah's once; she said everybody was between somebody and somebody else; just what you have been saying, only we were talking of businesses, — callings, — in the world; that it was not high or low, but that every real business or doing was between. But it seems to me that there are two ways of it, — being between for what you can *do for* right and left, and being so for what you can *get from* right and left. There are some betweens that have no business to be."

"Thank you, Miss France. You have given me a beautiful text, now, for a sermon. Perhaps I shall try to preach it, day after to-morrow. But to-night, — the sun is doing his shining low now, and we must get you home."

I wonder if Bernard Kingsworth did not see that he was establishing a relation with this girl — she being just what she was, a good deal short of an angel and yet not a rushing fool — that might, that almost must, in the every-day working of every-day life, preoccupy against that other which ordinarily develops and subsists upon a certain level that daily life may maintain? That he was setting himself forth where she would look upward to him at her highest gaze; not dream of being able to walk hand in hand with him; not desiring, or in an attitude to desire, what from him would almost seem like a profaning of the heavenly with the earthly.

Or, not setting forth himself at all, but the truth, would he have gone on just the same, though he had known that for the truth's sake he was putting from him the fair possibility of earthly joy and earthly marriage?

It is hard to receive the saying, save for them to whom it is given.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WORLD FOR ME!

The sun was indeed getting low over the hills; there is an intermediate sunsetting in these mountain regions that makes the double twilight and the manifold coloring a long and lovely wonder.

In the deep woods which they presently entered the day had cooled and faded; the air was full of wet fragrance from every kind of aromatic stem and leaf that had been so lately steeped in the rain and shaken again by the warm wind. Every step pressed forth an odor; the slant gleams of light searched into horizontal reaches of beautiful forest, beneath and among close-weaving branches that only the rabbit and the wild bird and their like could thread, the more charming and mystical because human creatures might only peer in and make to themselves sweet fables.

Bernard Kingsworth made France use his climbing-staff; he showed her how to plant it, how to time it with and make it help her own steps; at hard places, where any spring or reach was necessary, he took her arm and partly lifted her across; for the most part he quietly preceded her, turning aside the branches and choosing the smoothest way for her to follow. It was happy care to him; he was beginning to discern clearly how happy, and what a wish was growing with it; for her, she took it as she took his teaching. He was greater and stronger and wiser than she; it was good for her that she had known him; it was a great deal for him to do, to accompany her and guard her in these little ways; she felt safe, she felt a gratitude that was sweeter for her reverence, a reverence that was sweeter for her gratitude; she felt the nearness of the noble, that it quickens and ennobles one to feel; she was on a high occasional

plane; it was a mountain-top of intercourse: presently she would come quite gladly down again with what the hour had given her, to be the better for it through many hours of commoner living, the week-day times and places that must be six to one until the whole world comes to a Sabbath that needs not to be set apart, — a city of habitation in which there will not have to be any temple.

Do not think less of my heroine. I have taken her just where she was, among the "Everidges"; there must be a great many of them among us a long time before the Kingsworths will become the common people. But I think she was noble in her place, and growing toward a nobler; that is why I like her and have taken her. I only cannot make her quite in love with Bernard; perhaps you, my girl reader, are not yet ready to be.

When they came out at last into the fair, still light upon the open river, where the creek stopped the woodpath, and the thick forest-growth gave way again to low alders and birches and laurel-bushes, there lay the two little boats, — the lightest possible fishing-skiffs, that could follow the narrow, shallow waters and hide anywhere in the nooks and inlets of their margins. Flip Merriweather, his striped shirt dried comfortably upon his back, and his coat still spread upon a bush where it had got such a drying as it might, sat waiting in one. Israel Heybrook was in the other.

It was settled that Flip should take the minister and the load of berries, Rael the two girls. Flip threw his coat across the bit of seat between the bows; Mr. Kingsworth took his place in the stern, ready to handle, if need be, the tiny tiller.

Sarell was used to steering, and there were irregular, weedy, osiery patches in the river, and narrow bends between its sandy little flats, which, with three in the boat, would make steering needful. Would France mind the seat in the bow, — for which Rael had a cushion ready, — or, could she (it was very easy) manage the tiller? There was a slight, unconscious emphasis upon the "could" in Rael's question, and a persuasion in his parenthetical assurance. He would rather, certainly, give her the best place; and France *had* steered a boat once or twice upon a pond. She thought she would like to try again, under

orders. Rael smiled; they sat face to face with each other. Rael pressed his oar against the bank, and the boat slid forward on the smooth, golden water.

Just as they parted immediate company, Mr. Kingsworth recollected something.

"I had nearly left your letter in my pocket all night, Miss France," he said; "for I had quite forgotten it, the mail-delivery not being usually in the Thumble woods." And he reached across to her a business envelope, with her name upon it in her father's handwriting.

France put it in her own pocket. "I will save it till I get home; thank you," she said. "It won't be long to read. Papa always writes in a hurry, and *sometimes* he signs himself, 'Yours affectionately, George H. Everidge and Company.'"

The girl laughed, with a happy note in her voice. Something — the letter, or the golden light upon the water, or the novelty of the lovely river-way in the warm, hushed twilight, ending such a play-day after her long restraint — made in her, as they floated off with that delicious, dreamy motion, a vibration of pure joy.

It was the first time they had been together, she and Rael, since that night so long ago. This was the joining to that other; and straight from the holiday in the woodlands and the hill-quarries, and on the steep-winding, glorious mountain roads, they slipped into this evening stillness and beauty with each other, — almost alone, for they two only were face to face, — under that color-lit sky and upon this outspread, opal-shining stream.

France would not pretend to know she was so happy; she would not quite look at her own delight, lest she should find it out not all to be from the joy of the restful heaven or the drinking-in of the water peace. She sat silent. Rael, pulling up stream, and leaning to his oars, made obeisance to her in his heart every time he bent toward her. It was like something he did not think of, but which moved him gladly; it was like the life-effort he could make — the pull up stream against whatever current — with such a face, smiling-happy, turned toward him, toward him alone.

France began to sing — not words. She broke into a tremu-

lous, deep warble of notes, that presently climbed into a sudden ecstasy. They fitted themselves to the transport of the moment; to the movement, up and on, into an ever unfolding triumph and satisfying of that wonderful hour, — the hour and the place were surely enough, — as it lingered and revealed itself upon the hill-tops, clothed in a hundred tints; as the hill-tops changed, leaning and overhanging and sliding away, while they passed up beneath their glory or their shadow; as the day, hiding behind those western summits, seemed to loiter there in a beautiful miracle, playing at going down, and prolonging and multiplying every gorgeous and tender phase of its declining. It was as if something of the Beyond unrolled itself in exquisite promise and foretouch; as if great gates were open, through which one day — into which this day was transfiguring — they might sail in to an eternal blessedness. It made life feel as if its best were near.

And the syllables of France's song, if she had uttered them, as from some hidden, unthought impulse the music of it rushed to her lips, would have been that impassioned outpouring, —

"I shall meet him where we always meet;
He is waiting, waiting for me!
My heart is full! I can hear it beat!
I am coming, I am coming, —
I am coming, my love, to thee!"

It was a song she had heard only, she had not been used to sing it. Its music came first, then suddenly she recollected the words, and like the dropping lark's or the hushing nightingale's, all the effluent revel of sound quenched instantly in a deep of silence.

"O, sing again!" said Rael; and stopped with the three words, as she had stopped with her singing.

"O, I can't!" France answered and laughed. "It sang itself, and it left itself off. It was the sunset singing."

"It was more like the sunrise," said Rael; and again he said no more.

Sarell was wonderfully silent. If she and Rael had been alone, no doubt she would have sung. It seems an instinct with young people to sing when they are riding or sailing in beau-

tiful hours and places; then the globe itself seems only some palace vehicle, and they borne on through spaces of an infinite life-ecstasy. They sing as the morning stars sang when they were born. And Sarell was nearly always singing, though she knew little music but the popular catches, and the Moody and Sankey hymn-tunes.

But to-night, with these two there before her, and after France Everidge's voice had lifted itself up in just that one strange strain, she did not feel Moody-and-Sankey-like. She hardly felt like Sarell Gately, the exuberant.

This world is so full of strange "might-be's"! It is not the Maud Mullers alone who look back and sigh and dream in the potential preterite; the might-be's are all around us, every one, in the present. We see things we might live, if there were only a little more, or different, of us; there is but just such, and enough to give us the insight. We see into lives around us as we see into heavenly things, — truly, too, as we see into the infernal things. "*But* for the grace of God," and "Were it the grace of God," are words with which we may put ourselves into any human places. We do it in that potential of us which is the protoplasm of our spiritual creation. Then — without sighing, just because we cannot bear to sigh — we take up the fact where we left it, and live on; not quite as we should have lived, had we not seen, else why the vision?

Sarell took up what she called her "circumstance," and contented herself with it: she knew what was for her, and what was not. Nevertheless, there was a certain something that laid a hand upon her, and quelled her down, in this near-coming, in her very outward sight, of that in which she could not be a part.

What would it seem like to her that Rael Heybrook should say to her in that tone, "O, sing again"?

She had very nearly made up her mind to marry Hollis Bassett, — he was her circumstance, — and to live at East Hollow. Yet here, at Fellaiden West Side, at the Heybrook farm, were all the happiest chances and episodes of her experience till now, — the strongest and most loyal interests, too, though her equality and her possibility were elsewhere; for was she not

going to put herself where she could "see to things" that involved the Heybrook weal, and chiefly for that purpose? She could marry Hollis Bassett, if she liked, and "'pear out" at Wakeslow. An obscure tang of bitterness crept into her feeling, seeing these two as they were to-night, and thinking what she meant to do for Rael.

Not that she saw so definitely what the two did not see for themselves: she only perceived the like to like, in an estate and order to which she could but almost, and with her farthest ideal, come. She could not have stayed there, any more than France could yet stay where Bernard Kingsworth abode in the spirit; any more than the angels of the third heaven can be more than caught up into the first, or a man into the third.

The strain upon us is hard; yet but for the strain where would ever be our heaven?

Sarell was so quiet — turning half around, and leaning in the bow, trailing a bit of bush that she had been shading her eyes with in the softly parting water — that they half forgot her presence. It was easy to forget things that did not assert themselves.

"I have been talking with Miss Ammah again to-night," Rael said. "She has bought the Gilley place, — right out, house and all. She has given fifteen hundred dollars."

"I knew she would buy it," said France. "She quite meant it. She only left you 'to get used to it' she said."

"I shall never get used to it so as not to feel her goodness," said Rael. "She insists that it is for her own pleasure; and I suppose in a way it is, or I could not take it easily at all. She is fond of Fellaiden, and she is younger and a good deal stronger than my mother. Our home, I suppose she thinks, may not always be open to her."

Rael was rowing slowly; the other boat — Flip was an expert oarsman; he spent more time in pleasure than Rael Heybrook did — had worked ahead. The intricacies of the river were beginning; it bent and twisted here under the crags; and little bushy islets, grown up on ledgy rocks, divided the current, and made its depth and force irregular, as it shot and wound along their broken stretches.

"Now the tiller, please!" Rael said to France. "To the left; that bears us to the right, you know. Ease a little; now bear a little more. Keep for that white point of bare rock in the projection of the Thumble woods."

France got eye and hand together, feeling the working of the tiller, and sat intent; her look fixed, like a pilot's, on the mark. Rael smiled to see her earnest fidelity, that was, perhaps, beyond the occasion. It was in her, though, for the occasion that should need; and the smile had that recognition in it, also.

They swept round under the shade of the mountain; a rocky promontory behind them put its curve about them like an arm, and walled them from the southwest; the gentle south slope of Fellaiden Hill reached upward from across the river-line as they followed the shadowy bend that was like a little tarn. Over them, the clouds were pink and flame-color, and the blue was tinted with chrysoprase. In a cradle-dip of the high horizon, between two swells of dusky green, the young moon was leaning her soft white breast toward the vanished sun, like the downy breast of a bird. Further north, through a saffron glow that almost veiled it, burned the ineffable spark of the evening star.

"Oh, stop!" cried France; and Rael lifted his oars.

They were all alone there. The other boat had already passed around.

A whip-poor-will began to sing. Its clear, sweet notes cut through the still air with swift repeating lashes of sound. Not "whip-poor-will," but "a-world-for-me — a-world-for-me," its lone, rapt whistle seemed to say.

"Do you hear that?" asked France softly. And then she translated it.

"I hear it now," said Rael. "I suppose I felt what it was, before. I often have."

"To-night," said France, "*we* are here. It is not all for the whip-poor-will. But how many nights there is nobody here, or in the ten thousand other places that are being so beautiful. That is what I think in those lovely wood-corners, where nobody goes. Once in years, somebody finds them, and has that strange pleasure of finding that is half a puzzle why they are hid away so."

"Perhaps that is why, and enough," said Rael. "Or, I suppose pleasantness is pleasure, somehow; a fact, independent of our finding; or else it would n't be to be found. I don't suppose we can be pleased without a pleasure, any more than we can hear without an atmosphere that is all alive with sound, or see without a sunlight that is full of its own pictures. I suppose it is all there; that it is — "

But if the thought completed itself, it was not in speech. He left the sentence there.

The whip-poor-will finished it. "A-world-for-me — a-world-for-me," he kept saying.

The "Good Pleasure" for which "all things are, and were created," a living, loving Reality in these "waste places" of beauty, waiting for the children and the creatures — human souls and little birds — to come, and to share it; for the human souls to be touched by it, so as to find, if they will, that which is ever dividing itself, as bread, for them!

Hidden away, the waste places, for that "why" and that "enough"! Prepared, adorned, like festal chambers, for a kind surprise, where the Heart that has devised it crowns its own divine delight with the happy wonder of the "little flock" to whom it means to "give the kingdom."

Close to that Great Heart, and so the closer to each other, the girl and youth found themselves, and kept silence, and listened to the Word of it, that — virgin-modest before the sacredness — neither ventured to speak further. Not "religious," either of them, they thought, and therefore shy of a religious utterance; but I wonder if the vital thing were not growing in them, with that pleasantness which was a Presence all about them, and that something scarce understood, and no less a Presence, in their hearts?

I wonder if that moment, and that thought, and that point in their young lives, and that lovely river and sky solitude, had not all been meant for, and bearing toward each other, in those Purposes that we are so apt to think cannot be purposed, — ever since — and before — those waters and those skies were made?

"I shall meet him — I shall meet her — where we always

meet!" Was not the song singing itself along those unspoken reaches of the spirit, where they were beginning to be sure to find each other?

And yet France would have shrunk, still, from analyzing that moment, or from explaining herself to herself. There was still something in her that would have revolted, if she had asked herself why this last half-hour had been the crown and fulfilment of the whole beautiful day.

So she did not ask, but drifted on in the half-light that was so rosy, that must be so brief.

It was not far, after that, to the Little Crossing, — a narrow neck in the river, where a chain of stones made foundation for a bridge, built with single planks clamped down to the rocks, and a single hand-rail running along its upper side.

The best landing for the boats was upon the Thumble shore; Flip's was already drawn up there, and he and the minister had crossed the bridge, making room for the others to follow. Sarell was over while Rael was hauling his skiff out upon the gravel; she was used to foot-bridges and dam-crossings; then Rael stepped before France upon the plankway, and turned to reach his hand toward her. She answered the motion by one of her own, just holding a hand ready, if need were, to take the help of his. So, with offer and acceptance not actually joined, they passed the pretty, rippling current between the jutting banks; an old, bent, butternut tree, leaning over from one side, making a shady cavern above the bridge, in which the dark pool of water lay shining with its very blackness. France paused, for a single step, in the middle, and looked over into it. As she looked up, she met Rael's eyes.

"That is another of the ten thousand," she said, smiling. "I begin to think they are all right here in Fellaiden. I think if the summer could last, I should never want to go away."

If Rael Heybrook had answered that in words, he would have said less. Perhaps, indeed most likely, for her look went swiftly back to the river, France did not see the flash in his face. She could not know the quick leap of the pulse in him as he moved on so staidly the few paces further, and then, at the steep little rough-beaten ascent of the bank, leaned back

and reached the hand again that she put hers into now, and drew her with a firm grasp upward to his side.

The minister bade them good-night. Their paths lay cross-fields now, and his was a different way from theirs. Flip kept on, helping with the baskets. Rael let him have one, saying, "All right, Phil. I 'll drive you home, presently."

Sarell marched steadfastly in advance. Flip followed. Still, Israel and France were left together.

The moon slipped down beyond West Ridge. Her slender horn turned golden as it dipped behind the line of dark green wall. It curved upward, showing, before it quite went down, like the horn of a great golden ox, lifting its head from pasture in the translucent sky-fields on that further side.

They crossed the brook, presently, that ran below the Pleasaunce; then they climbed the rounded slope of the Great Mowing, quite up out of the valley-basin.

The farm-house door was open, and there were people on the porch; a bright light was already burning where they were not always used to have lights in these summer evenings, — in the west parlor.

Somebody came forth to meet France as she crossed the door-yard from the field gateway, and Rael turned up toward the barns.

"My dear little girl!" and Mr. Everidge put his arm about his daughter and kissed her. "You did not even get my letter," he said.

"Why, papa!" exclaimed France, tremulous with surprise. "I have just got it, — in my pocket!" And then, with some strange feeling, she put her arms quickly about his neck, and kissed him again, breaking into little sobs and tears.

CHAPTER XX.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

Of course, they said she was tired and nervous; that the surprise was too much for her; that she had had a long, hard day, too hard for the first after such a shutting-up: and they took her in, and gave her hot tea and cream-toast, and some beefsteak off the slice that had been broiled for her father after his journey, for they were all waiting supper for her. And then Mr. Everidge told her how he had suddenly determined to take a vacation of a day or two, and that Princeton and Magnolia were both too gay and dressed-up to rest in, and that he had made up his mind to come and look after his little lame child, and finally, that he had news for her that he had chosen to come and tell her himself, — "good business news," for one thing; she was the little daughter who had always, years ago, in the old days before they were all fine, brought his slippers and climbed on his knee, and asked him "how bidnits wad to-day?" and he thought she had a right to know. He would tell her *all* about it to-morrow; but he had been making a great deal of money, and she should say how some of it should be spent.

He told her all this on the piazza after tea, when they were out there by themselves. He was curiously talkative, with his gladness at getting her again, and his good fortune that he had come to tell her of.

And France sat close beside him, and held his hand in hers, and felt something that she could not understand, — of self-reproach, and a kind of shame that she was not his "little girl" any longer; as if she had been daring to grow up all at once, she scarcely knew how, into a woman without asking leave.

She sat very quiet, and listened to him. She did not seem

eager to ask him questions. She hid herself away, as it were, in her daughterhood, nestling by his side, almost as if she had just been forgiven for something, and been taken back there.

After she had taken her candle and gone — still just like a child, because he told her it would be better for her — to her room, she set the light down upon her dressing-table, and ran to the low roof-window, and sat down upon the floor, leaning her head upon her hands upon the sill, and cried again, feeling her cheeks hot under her tears, blazing hot, all the time.

She was confused, distressed. The coming of her father had suddenly confronted all things past with all things present. She felt herself in a different relation to everything : was it a true relation ? or, where was the truth ? where was the right and the glory, and where was the shame ? All her training, all the subtile, daily religion — for it was a creed, a cult, a binding — of social life in which she had lived, rose up in judgment now, and held her at the bar, indicted, if not convicted, of some strange, half-discerned trespass ; and the accusation lay in the unwhispered demand, the demand of his mere presence, "What would her father say ?" Unwhispered. She did not ask herself. What had she precisely to ask herself about ? About what should her father say anything ?

Why was she reminded with a pain, instead of a pleasure, of the life and place she must go back into, quite separate from this, in which she had had a brief summer-time of new delight ? Why were there such separate worlds of living in this one world and life of human creatures ? Why would not her father understand ? Why would he be amazed, yes, disgusted, if he knew all she had given to-day, of her purest sympathy, her highest estimation, — all the warmth with which she had exulted in her own finding and claim as she gave it, — to this nature and character of a man, a *young* man, quite out of her sphere, reared among the plainest, used only to the plough and the hoe, the hay-field and the milking-yard ? Could she not come here for a few weeks' country idling without getting — infatuated ? — Faugh !

Was it her own, or her father's imagined disgust that made her break from her thought when an actual word thrust itself

forth, like a writing on the wall of her consciousness, a shape formed suddenly in the chaos of her reflections?

Why was she afraid he had come to take her home again? Why had she not dared to ask, or given him any chance to tell her? What was that tender compunction that had made her as if she had been disobeying, or injuring him, secretly?

Why could she not be wholly glad of the good success he came to tell her of, that was going to make their ways more free and splendid, and even more established? Why did she not want to be drifted so far that way? That money that he had been making in some larger way than usual, how could she care to say how it should be spent? As if people could spend money just as they would choose! as if other people, whose plans and hopes all depended on a little money that perhaps they could not get, would let them! Oh, what a tangle life was, and she only just beginning it!

Yet, after all, what had she done, and what was there wrong in her? and where was going to be the dreadful difficulty? Had not Miss Ammah made friends and sympathies here? Did she not care for this brave fellow, Rael, and his plans? Was not he, were not all of them, — Bernard Kingsworth, the minister, dear, good Mother Heybrook, and Lyman, with all his boy-roughness and awkward wit, — her *great* friends?

They were her own great friends also. She was thankful to have made them. It was *grand* here, among the hills, and with these fresh, simple-strong people. Why had she been catechizing and tormenting herself? She would show her father something of her new world, that was more than country air or restful stillness or blank interval between points of more positive and intense existence.

She lifted her head. She had been so foolish, tired, and nervous. The far-away mountain-sides and shadowy peaks were softly dark in the still evening: they reassured her. The heaven was full of stars to its depths of depth; Arcturus was shining, like a king in his own place, in the mid-altitude over where the sun had set. Everything about her was great, not small; everything was pure, not spoiled; the heaven and the earth were wider; she had grown and climbed, not degenerated

and descended. She was ashamed of her ashamedness; what had it all been about?

To-morrow, she would take her father into some of this beautifulness: he would be glad, he would feel and receive it. He should know Rael Heybrook and the rest. On Sunday, he would hear Mr. Kingsworth preach. They would be standing in the same place then, they would come to see things together, — she and this good father, so strong and wide in his own work and knowledge, whom she loved and was so proud of.

If she could only coax him into a world like this, to live there, with the money that he had got!

And so France went to bed, and went to sleep; and nine hours later, when day was regal over the great country-side, she came forth out of her chamber like a princess, and found her father, and led him to that low piazza with the magnificent outlook, to see the far-off river mists winding away southward between the steadfast mountains and all the rich farm-lands lying smiling, up and down on the hill-bosoms, in the morning sun.

It was out here, while they waited for breakfast, that he told her his other news.

Euphemia was engaged to be married to Mr. Sampson Kaynard. He had been at Magnolia, where Euphemia had joined Helen and the Uppertons, and been with them for the past month; and now he had gone with her and Helen to their mother at Princeton. Her mother was pleased; everybody said it was a fine match. Kaynard was good-natured and rich, he was of good family, there was nothing against him. — "Only," France thought, "that they called him '*Samp.* Kaynard,' and he *was* sampy!" — He was one of those men you were rather tired of seeing about in society; but now he would settle and have a home, he would show better. Mr. Everidge had no objection; Euphemia was suited. He would as lief there were a little more of "Nature's nobleman" about the fellow; but as men go, he was better than the ordinary.

There was a little emphasis upon Euphemia's name: she was not the nearest in sympathy to her father; she was not France.

This marriage was great news. It would make much to be

new and different. This and the good fortune — had they any latent connection, France wondered? — that her father spoke of so differently from that of any mere good voyage or rise in merchandise that had often given him prosperous seasons before.

Why did it not trouble her, as things did last night? Why was the string, that had vibrated so painfully then, less tense this morning?

It *was* morning, that was nearly enough. And all this grandeur of God's making, so far beyond the playhouse grandeur of cities, was about them, visible again. Her father's words, too, that "Euphemia was suited," and of the "Nature's nobleman" that he could wish his son to be, — this father to whom his daughters must bring him sons, since he had never had son born to himself, — something in these seemed to free and justify the girl again, upon her higher degree and with her larger, new-found standards.

At the very moment that she was listening to what he said about this "well enough" Mr. Sampson Kaynard, Israel Heybrook, in his white shirt-sleeves, and with his proud, firm step and his uplifted forehead, passed below them across the field that was but a little bit of his free estate. Free, because the power and intent were in him to make and keep it so. *Real* estate indeed; not the kind, in prospective city lots or outlying suburbs, which cramps men in a poverty of heavy tax and delusive expectation; but real and rich with all the earth holds in it for him who can truly subdue it; splendid and satisfying with what men expend hard-won fortunes to get a little piece and miniature of, in some place where they can hold it joined to the artificial living and open to the admiring gaze of people who value earth by the foot, and the outspread and adornment of it by what costly gardeners and professional beautifiers can do to tame it down.

Something that was not hers at all, — that she knew herself, as well as she had known last night, most separated from by all that might seem to be hers, — made France feel proud, that moment.

It was morning again with her; and the day was full of sun-

shine, — sunshine that no one could shut away into any one little measured place, or keep from her.

It was later in the day, after breakfast, and a walk with the young men over to the Gilley place, whence Mr. Everidge returned in a fine humor of enjoyment, entering keenly into the speculative advantages of the purchase and the plans concerning it, and greatly praising Miss Ammah's shrewdness — the last quality that had entered into her motive, on her own part, in the transaction — and the practical capacity and good sense of "that young farmer," that they came round, by natural connection, to other enterprises, and the fuller explanation of what Mr. Everidge had himself been doing.

First, however, Miss Ammah had put in her protest.

"I hate shrewdness," she said uncompromisingly. "It 's perverted wisdom. It 's brawling for one's self in the world's mix. It 's an ill thing, and close to cursing. Look in your Webster for that. I did n't buy Gilley's for shrewdness. I bought it for what it just is, one of the loveliest bits of the rind of this earth. And I mean to have it kept so. But now, friend Everidge, we 'll have thy wisdom, and not call it shrewdness. You were going to tell us what you have been doing in that mix of things down below, where you usually come uppermost, You have been 'diving deeper, and coming out drier,' than common, eh?"

And Miss Ammah drew out her yarn comfortably, starting afresh on a long row. She looked sharply, though, at Mr. Everidge, as she put her demand.

The merchant laughed; he was used to her tirades, and he was honest; so he meant and thought. He did not much mind her hurling Webster at his head, for his "shrewdness." Yet he felt what he had to say coming into a curious light, beginning to say it just after that.

"I 've been making a dip into those silver mines; and I have come out electro-plated. That 's all."

Mr. Everidge shook the ashes from his cigar over the piazza railing, and laughed, slightly, again. France, searching for a nice, imperceptible grade of color among her violet wools, left off her comparisons, and lifted up her head.

"Money does stick to some people," remarked Miss Tredgold. "Are you sure you *are* out?"

"O, yes! That is precisely the thing one must be sure of. It's like those intensely cold mineral springs you bathe in, down there in Pennsylvania. It's in, and right out again. If you do it just right, you're a made-over man, twice as alive as you were before. But if you stay a minute too long, you might n't ever come out alive at all."

Both the women had stopped all pretence of work, and were looking at him now.

"I wonder," said Miss Ammah, "if the prophet of Khorassan was n't electro-plated. His last dip finished him, you know."

"Should n't have taken it," said Mr. Everidge concisely.

"Then what did he leave the tub standing there, for? You don't talk quite as you ever talked about business before," said Miss Ammah.

"No. This is n't business. It's a thing that happens once in a man's lifetime."

"How much *has* happened to you? How much *are* you made over?" Miss Ammah asked bluntly. She never used much ceremony; and she had known Mr. Everidge, in her straightforward way, for more than thirty years.

"Just how much have I made, you mean. Well, you're a confidante, my wife trusts you when she turns her dresses: I had in about twelve thousand, and it came out multiplied by fifteen."

"Papa!" cried France; and the wools fell mingled again in her lap. That was an announcement! Miss Ammah looked just as equipoised as ever. She waited long enough to give point and seeming to her next sentence.

"George Everidge," she said, then, in her calmest tones, "*I* want a dip."

"Better not," he replied to her. "Better let well enough alone."

"Why should n't I be electro-plated?"

"Because you might get your skin taken off, instead."

"Oh!"

Miss Ammah let that syllable and tone continue isolated an instant; then she said, "I hope you 're going round, now, to tell all the women and fools *not* to jump into that tub that you 've left standing. Because it 's what some of them will be sure to do when they see you shine so."

"Is it best to tell women and fools *not* to do a thing?" asked Mr. Everidge, laughing.

"Papa," said France, coming round to the red settee at her father's side, "please tell me all about it. I don't understand about 'dips.' How could you make all that money so quickly? I thought mining was slow work."

"So it is if you dig and smelt. But the rise in stocks anticipates. The bonanza was there, sure enough. As soon as you know that, the money is there. Then, you see, it would bear more shares, and we who knew first had the first chance to buy in. It was all real," he answered to the look in her face, "solid and sure. Then the premiums ran up. I sold on the first rush; I got what my shares were worth. That 's what we call 'realizing.'"

"I should think the realizing would have to come afterward. Why did n't you stay in, and get your pay out of the mine? It might have been more; and why would n't it have been safer? I think if I had part of a silver mine I should rather keep it. You always say it is so hard to know where to invest."

"It would be safer, Fran', if you could control. Safer, and pretty slow. But you see, apart from interest, an honest man would rather sell what he knew in his conscience he had to sell. Mining is queer work, and stocks are paper. It is so easy to make more paper when the name is up; and by and by, maybe, receipts won't cover, or there comes a stop. The sure way to make money out of a mine is to make it out of the first fact of a mine."

"But it goes on," said France, "all that paper-making. Your selling out does n't stop it. And somebody, one of these days, when your shares get down to them, — or what your shares are cut up into, — will get what is n't worth anything?"

"If they don't look out they may. People should inform

themselves. The mine is there. It is not a fable. But if the boat won't float more than twenty men, the twenty-first should n't jump aboard."

"I should n't think it was done in the right way," said France.

"Few things are from beginning to end," said her father, "that 's why the beginnings are best. But you can't understand all about 'bidnits,' little girl! Your part comes in afterward. You won't be upset by it, I can see; therefore, I shall think the more of your voice in council. There are plans in the family already. What would you think of a house in town for the winter?"

France drew a long breath as if brought back from somewhere. In truth she was not in any way so overwhelmed with the prosperity as a woman of older or more chequered experience would have been. She had always had everything; she was used to knowing that her father had made money, — ten, twenty thousand, more sometimes, in a year. That he should have made a hundred and sixty-eight thousand in a month or two was merely a relative matter. The difference made even less relative impression. If Mr. Everidge had "realized," his daughter scarcely had. There were other things, — principles and remote bearing, — more or less vaguely presenting themselves to her mind.

"Papa," she said, gravely pressing to her cheek the hand that had come around her neck and laid itself upon her shoulder, "if ever I should *want* to spend some of this very money for you, will you promise to let me do it?"

"You shall have your share," he said fondly, "and some day you shall spend it for yourself."

Miss Ammah had rolled up the big afghan that she was crocheting together. She had risen now, and was walking toward the house-door in the angle.

"O!" she said, turning back to Mr. Everidge, "I had forgotten to congratulate you!"

Which queer congratulation, if it were that, the gentleman received with the amusement Miss Ammah Tredgold usually excited in him.

They did not see Bernard Kingsworth that day. He was at home, writing his sermon.

In the afternoon Flip Merriweather came, spontaneously, and took Mr. Everidge off with him to his skiff and the creek, to show him the trout pools under Thumble.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUNDAY, AND A SERMON.

THERE is never any Sunday in a novel proper. The seventh stitch is dropped, and the thread catches directly over from Saturday night to Monday morning. Stories are purely secular. There is nothing of the inside that determines or affects them.

I have given you a bit of one Sunday, and of what it contributed to the essential history underneath the narrative with France Everidge and the rest; and now Mr. Everidge, her father, having come up here to Fellaiden expressly for a merchant's holiday, of which the Sunday is the centre, I am not going to skip it, but shall tell you of the day, and of Bernard Kingsworth's word for the day.

The conclusion of the syllogism is, that this is no novel. Herein I anticipate the critics. I give you fair warning that it is Sunday, and that there is going to be preaching to-day, as the railroads put up their crossing-boards and bid you beware of the engine while the bell rings.

The bell was ringing from the little white belfry, of no particular architecture, under the northern crest of Fellaiden Hill. The sound had to surge up and ripple over; then it floated down and ran into the valley and all along the quiet slope, where the grain-fields lay shining with mute praise, and the unyoked oxen grazed in the still pastures, and the farmhouses and barns had a placid hush upon them; men were resting, or giving themselves the more ample refreshing of Sabbath ablutions and fair, clean linen; the women were doing the needful work of the day's mere existence with a leisurely touch that was in itself a rest from the drive and energy of the purposeful week that must begin again to-morrow; the children were in their best little jackets and frocks and shoes, with here and there a

frill or a ribbon bespeaking the blessed holiday, different and safer from soil than school-days; the very hens walked about more sedately, and as if there were less upon their minds concerning even the laying of their Sunday eggs.

You cannot leave the Sunday out of the country! It seems there as if it would come round, though men did not keep it. Everything hushes down; it is different from the very dawning.

Mr. Everidge had found himself in no such quietness for a dozen years. He had spent Sundays at watering-places with his family: things were dropped off there that made a faint comparative change; the bowling-alleys were let alone, and there was no croquet or tennis or dance in the evening; but all day long there were the toilets and the promenades, and the newspapers and the talk of the men and the smoking in the reading-rooms, and the same clatter and serving of prolonged meals, and perhaps even more driving up and away of carriages and consequent work and hurry at the stables. Here he felt as if he had been lifted off the busy planet and set in some asideness, where the whirl of it had gone away from under his feet and left him in a fair mirage only of its serenest pictures.

It seemed quite mid-day, after the long, beautiful morning, when the wagon came to the door for the church party. It was the big double wagon, with the two horses. Mrs. Heybrook and Sarell were both going; the afternoon tea-dinner was all prepared for; and the three visitors, it was taken for granted, were going too.

Mr. Everidge had never been to church in a three-seated, open country wagon. There was something queer about it, something incongruous in his scrupulous, stylish, town street-suit and his high hat; he felt curiously like something driven about in a show; he was really a strange species here. The women were less so: a man's elegance, when you separate it from its like, is something a great deal more pronounced than a woman's. A woman may be loud, tawdry; then she is not elegant. But men have certainly reserved to themselves, in their apparent relinquishment as to forms and colors, a severe distinction, which makes their dress or undress a most conspicuous matter in the case of a sole example.

There was nobody at all like Mr. Everidge on the way, or around the church doors, where masculine Fellaiden was congregated at the moment of their arrival. It was worse yet, in the square little interior, as he walked, expressly tall, up the middle aisle-way. He was used to a place of worship where there were stately, high-backed pews; a gentleman passed in in a quiet shadow, and a woman's silk trailed, out of sight and noiseless, upon the soft, thick carpet. Here, all was in a broad light; and the white-painted wainscots, with their red-stained top rails, seemed hardly higher than his knees. His very hat, again, was obtrusive, as he carried it in his hand. Really, he was glad to be seated, with a hedge-row of shawls and bonnets in front and rear.

When a door opened, however, beside the slightly elevated platform, which, with its plain arm-chair and reading-table, constituted the pulpit, and Bernard Kingsworth walked in to his place, where he stood a moment with bowed head behind the desk, as if entered into the Presence that is always with the simplest two or three that may gather together in the One Name — Mr. Everidge ceased to feel that he was uncomfortably the only "gentleman," technically speaking, in the place.

When, after the quaint and somewhat vociferous singing, the reading of a Gospel chapter, and the utterance of a brief prayer — in which the chief element seemed to be a consciousness that the Being addressed needed not to be told anything, but that the man who prayed, and his people, needed to be told everything, and that they had come there to listen to Him who had given his Word, and promised the teaching of his Spirit — the sermon was begun, there was but one thing to be thought of in that little breezy, day-lighted meeting-house. Everybody, unless the little children, forgot himself and his neighbor, as to bodily presence; compelled, by the keen presentment of more live relations, to apprehend himself and his neighbor in the regard of a certain inevitable, everlasting unity and identity.

"Jesus himself stood in the midst of them." That was the text.

When Solomon dedicated the Great Temple, the preacher

said, we hear that "the king hallowed the *middle court*." There he offered his great sacrifices, his burnt offerings and his peace offerings; because the mere symbolical "brazen altar before the Lord was too little to receive them."

It has always been the middle place that the Lord has made holy; not anything outside, or above, or separate. "The tabernacle was in the midst of the camp," and "The Lord God walked in the midst of the camp." "The Tree of Life was in the midst of the garden," and in the City of God, watered by the glad-making streams of the crystal river, He Himself "is in the midst of her, that she shall not be moved." When the Lord would signify the greatest, He "set a little child in the midst of them"; and "in the midst of the throne, and of the living creatures, and of the elders, is the Lamb as it had been slain."

The Story of the Scriptures is full of his declarations: "I will dwell in the midst of Israel" — "The Lord is in the midst of Thee" — "This is Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries," and "I will be the Glory in the midst of Her."

Samaria is in the midst, — Samaria, with her sins and her idolatries; and the Lord "must needs go through Samaria." And when at last He gave his mortal life, as a sign of the everlasting life that He evermore giveth for the life of the world, it was in the midst that He was crucified, between the thieves.

My friends, it is a necessity of all life that it should be "in the midst." We are none of us above or below, absolutely; it is a law that we must needs all be between.

I can only suggest to you, here and there, points where it is evidently so. The entire correlations of humanity are the innumerable fibres and intermovements of a body of life which is in truth the Body of God's Life; and in that infinite and beyond our tracing.

But first, we are between in our daily business and calling. I am between; you are between; every man who handles, to make use of, or to pass on, anything that the Lord creates, or any force He puts where we can touch it to move it — there-

fore, every farmer, artisan, tradesman, mechanic — is a power and a will between some cause and effect, some giving and receiving. He is "God's minister, attending continually on this very thing."

I suppose you see at once how a man who stands in a pulpit, who handles the Truth of God, and breaks the bread of the Lord's giving to the disciples, is a "minister." You call him so, and rightly; he *should* stand between Christ himself and the Christian Church, to receive and to give continually. But you, also, who till God's ground, and take from his hand what He gives through his life that is in the earth and the waters and the sunlight, are you not ministers, — high priests at a grand, beautiful Altar, which you dare not profane?

You take at first hand from the Maker. Through you, He provides the daily bread all the world is daily praying and crying for. He makes them to sit down in their places, by the fifties, by the hundreds, by the hundred thousands, and to you He divides that which is to feed them. *He* multiplies, not you: you only serve. It is high service, though; you are between the great, rich, abounding, God-alive earth and the hunger of the children. Yours is the first calling, without which the others could not be. Will you work like the angels, — doing the Will that is done in heaven? or, forgetting that Will and thinking only what is to remain to yourselves, will you do self-will, which is devil's will?

If you hold back, in time of scarcity, what the Lord's summer has ripened and you are ready to sell, if you mix bad with good, old with new, if you strain weight or measure to make it cover more than honest money's worth, — then you do devil's will; every man knows that. But there is even a greater righteousness than the Scribes and Pharisees' — the righteousness that has for its motive such love for the neighbor, such joy in producing all that the wisest skill and patientest labor can produce for the waiting want, that this love and joy become, to whosoever has them, his life and delight in doing; not the desire and pleasure, foremostly, of his own, and what he can gather up to himself in return for it. Is this a hard saying? Can you not yet hear it? It is what the Lord means for

you by putting you here among his hills and beside his streams. It is what He who gives his own flesh for bread means by telling you that you shall not live by bread alone; that the flesh profiteth nothing; that the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God, *that* a man shall live by; the words of the Christ that He speaks unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

You are not all farmers, though; you are men of trades, some of you, and some of you men of trade. You do work for your neighbor; in his house, for his clothing, in tools for his use; you buy for him what he has not time to go and buy for himself — this man who is getting all your bread out of the live ground — and what he does not know how to buy. You must have his bread for your service, or something from him that will entitle you to what you want from your other neighbor. But will you think most of good service or of great receipt? Will you buy cheapest and then sell dearest, or will you give your friend the benefit you pretend to give him, when you set yourself up in your occupation of attending to that which he cannot attend to himself? Will you do your best for your neighbor, or will you do your best for yourself, and let your neighbor look out sharp for his own part, if he does not want to be cheated?

The work of the world widens out into great things; things that make great stir and show upon the earth; great running hither and thither, wonderful contrivance to run quickly and fetch largely. Great fleets of ships are upon the waters; and the men who build and sail them, that the remotest askings and supplies may be brought together, that human life may be made fairer and richer by all that the whole planet holds for any human being — they are men of noble calling.

Our Lord Jesus passed his whole life in one small region; He only went once to the great sea-coasts of Tyre and Sidon; and then He did not go to wonder at, or praise, the ships that went down upon the mighty deep, or the merchant enterprise of the cities; but only, so far as we know, to heal the daughter of the woman who was not of Israel. Yet He who ever "stood in the midst" touched and illustrated all the springs and methods of life. He loved the little ships that went out upon Gennes-

saret : they were as true types as the great Phœnician vessels that sailed to far-off Tarshish. He often entered into them, to pass over from side to side, or to speak the word from the stillness of the waters. And when He "entered into a ship, his disciples followed him." We read that continually. I wonder what a ship stood for, to the thought of Jesus? A thing with white sails set to the winds of heaven, moving by that invisible power over the other element upon which man may not move by his own natural forces, with an errand in its going, always, — what is it but a will, set to the breath of a divine sending, moving by that breath when it might not move without it, and doing a commissioned errand? When Christ entered into a ship, He entered into some purpose of His Father's. And I think He did it so often, to teach that all the errands of the earth should be the errands of God's will.

Do the merchants build and sail their ships so? Do they enter into this highest joy, this depth of the reach, of their calling? I cannot say; but I can see how it should be, and how blessedly it would be, in all the wonderful ways given unto men to work in, if they "knew the time of their visitation" and "the things that belong to their peace," and did not let them be "hid from their eyes."

And so with all the making and transporting and interchange of the whole world; from the digging in mines to the coining into money; from the planting of the cotton-seed to the weaving and stitching; from the study of the physical powers and the adaptation of machinery, to the landing at each man's door of whatever men want in their homes for use and beauty, — all is divine; each servitor stands as a priest in his place, to minister between the last and the next, in the "order of Melchizedek."

But what shall we say of the false service that seeks to stop or to gather back the ministration unto self? It is a break and a confusion; it was never meant; there is no act of it that does not frustrate some beneficence; it stands between to curse, to hinder, to starve; it has to do with all the misery and the disorder and the sin that it tries, with its own hedging of law and luxury, to put out of sight. No man stands between to

take, as the gift passes on, regardless of what remains for the next taker, or the hundredth after, who does not take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs of his own covetous desires. No man receives an extortion, no man makes money by a fancy price, no man shuffles a thing quickly through his fingers, because it is sure to burn somebody's fingers on its way, who does not traffic in infernal fire.

What shall we say, sometimes, of a standing between that seems to us a noble interference? An interference between some unjust purpose and its fulfilment? A taking into our hands, perhaps, of some clever countermoving, whereby we may prevent or recompense a wrong?

Take care, lest we cast out evil by anything of Beelzebub. Take care, lest our love of triumph, of our own cleverness, our hate of the sinner that we call hate of the sin, move us to forget that the best place, the real place, the first place to be tried is between the tempted soul and his Satan, not between the evil conception after it has taken form, and the mere outside event that we would frustrate. What if we would not rather the evil should be in that soul, than that we should not have it to frustrate?

What shall we say, again, of those passive standings between, in which self is but a waiter on what it may blaspheme as "Providence"? What of watchings, of calculations, of evil wishes against others, that thereby something we think good may come to ourselves? Of the mere "What if it should happen?" that we let the thought of into our minds to dwell there, the thought of failure, disgrace, death, that may befall somewhere, and in consequence of which we may take the chance, the vacant place, the goods left for next ownership on the hither brink of a grave? What of a man's nature come between in such case, and between what and what does it stand? Do we always know?

Brothers, sisters, we are not merely fleshly men and women; we are spirits. We do not know what we handle when we aim and fix our secret thoughts, our wishes, our expectations. I have stood beside an apple-tree, and willed an apple to fall down. I cannot tell you the connection; I can only tell you

the fact; but the apple fell while I stood there. Do not stand wishing, waiting, for that which may happen to a fellow-creature, or in his life. You do not know what power you may have hold of, or how your secret sin may work for you, making you guilty of the event.

Our first accountability is deeper than issue or act; it is away back in our very selves, and what we give ourselves to, there. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against spiritual wickedness in high places," the high, incorporeal places of our own being, and the substantial, inward world with which we make ourselves related. We may be between celestial forces and the work of heaven, or between satanic forces and the work of hell. The field is the world; the evil seed is the planting of the Evil One. Again, the field is the world; and there is fair, sweet, true harvest in it; the Sower is the Son of man, and the tenders and the reapers are the angels.

"Spiritual wickedness in high places." They may be, outwardly, the high, withdrawn places of refinement, of moral, decorous life, of a life far separated and defended from the horrible life that makes prisons necessary, and a peril to lurk in lonely ways and out of the open sunlight, for the innocent. They may be the high places of simple, safe life like yours, in these mountain shelters. But I dare to tell you, that not a man of cleanest outward standing, of proudest peerage with other men, can have a hidden uncleanness or violence in him, that does not belong to, and work with, by the law of solidarity in good and in evil, the kindred evil that runs most dreadful riot beyond all social pale and recognition; that does not quicken the pulses of it, and make it more fierce, and the deeds of it to break out in greater cruelties and shames. I dare to tell you, that not a woman wastes a foolish hour before her glass, or steals one of God's days that He has lent her for His work, for the excessive decoration of her own dress, who does not touch, like Achan, "the accursed thing," the poison of self-covetousness, and make it ranker in the earth; because of whom, giving that much of her life into the tide of sin, there is not some great wave swelled higher, out on the open deep,

that breaks, away down there among the reefs, in wreck and horror she would not herself confess so much as to know of. I tell you that here, in this quiet country-side, where seldom any great sin comes to light to startle us, you may be just in this way guilty of the world's wretchedness of iniquity, that you keep alive in your own soul some breath that would be of it if it gained volume and vent, and could rush forth with its like that make the tempests. It will get forth, and it does; though you give it no body of act, and you think your hands are stainless. It was the dragon's breath that slew, without the touch of his talons; and it is every little drift of air, — perhaps even so little as the fanning of a bird's wing, — setting along its own way through the quietest spaces, that finds at last the gulf-currents of the atmosphere, and helps to whirl up the terrible cyclone.

You sit and read your newspaper; you read of felonies, of thefts and murders, and things that ought neither to be done nor told of; and you may read as thousands, I am afraid, do read, so as to be a part, yourself, of the dreadful story; a part after the fact, because you get your daily or your weekly news out of it; and your news would lose its spice if these things were not happening. There is a spiritual supply and demand, as well as a material: you are a part of an awful power, if you demand or delight in these things. They will keep happening, so long as there is that in human nature which will even hear them with any sort of strange recognition or entertainment. There is a realm in which and from which they work and flow; as the clouds are taken up out of the sea, and fall in floods, and make the rivers; and the very life of you must be part of a sea that exhales everywhere and gathers into a body and a power for an outpouring in the earth, — where, perhaps, you know not, — of the open works of righteousness or sin.

Will you say, then, that as this earth is made, or has become, there is no standing-place remaining for the man who will touch the ill thing neither with the right hand nor with the left? that we must take matters as they are, and do the best we can with them? that we cannot be more particular than our neighbors, since we are piece and part of this human being which,

for good or evil or the mixed two, has constituted itself already, before we ever came to help or hinder; and no one man, anywhere, can so set himself against the established order, as to alter its conditions?

Then I tell you, that One Humanity has so set itself, and has called us to that same kind of humanity, if we will be born to it; and to that same work of reconstituting the human being, which is *not* fulfilled or established yet, nor will be till all the rulings and servings of it become those of the kingdom of the Lord Christ. And the longer any man persists in just fending for himself with things, — good or evil, as he finds them to his hand, — just so much the more is the wilderness enlarged, and the thorny tangle of it manifolded; just so much the longer must it be, and by the multiplication, too, according to eternal powers and proportions, before "the Lord shall comfort Zion, and all her waste places"; before He "will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord."

Stand each man in his place; it is all He asks of you; the *whole* place is His; and stand for the Lord! You may seem to be alone; you may not be able to fit your life to the lives of your fellows. To what did the Son of God fit His life? He was alone in all the earth; there was no work or abiding on it for Him; the foxes — they of craft and greed — had their holes, and the birds of the air — the light, inconsequent ones, who troubled not themselves — had their nests, — the devouring of seeds, also, by the wayside; but the Son of man had not where to lay His head. His meat and drink were only the work of His Father against the world, and His home the Heart of His Father in Him, as He gave His life to be between that Heart and the suffering, sinful hearts of men, to turn them to it!

You may be called to do strange things, — hard things, even though small, for you to do. But the things are yet to be done, if there shall not be destruction after destruction upon the easy and familiar and unrighteous doing. The world *is* wrong — we must face the fact of it; and that it cannot be a wholly peaceful place to live in till the redemption of our God has fully come upon it. But it cometh, it draweth nigh! The powers of judgment are mightier than the powers of desolation; we know

not what shall be His magnifying of the smallest act, done in the remotest part, for His name. He did His mightiest works on earth in Galilee.

For He Himself abideth in the midst, where He said He would be, — in *all* the powers of heaven and earth.

He is in the midst — in the inmost — of the smallest and the furthest; of every smallest and of each most separate. That is how the whole place is His; that is how He is the Judge of the whole earth.

In the midst of your individual work, interest, thought, the very hope and intent of it is His, more than, and before, your own; and He will carry it through, *if only* your face is set toward Him, and your will in the way of His commandment.

He has occasion and fulfilment for you all; He has not made one too many, nor put one in a needless or forgotten place. There is not one particle too much, or of no consequence, in all the star-dust of His universe; there *cannot* be a human soul, or a human soul's experience, too much or too little in the making of His heaven; the very hairs of your heads are all numbered, and the hairs of your heads are every little outgrowth and particular of your living.

It is His own life in you that makes your life; it is His own wish for you that makes your wish. I do not mean to tell you that His *way* will always run along with your way. What you think is your wish is sometimes only your way. Then He will, by His way, teach you, and give you, better; for "the Lord's *portion* is His people, and Jacob is the lot of His inheritance." Therefore is your life holy. It is the tabernacle of the Lord of hosts, else were he not the Lord of hosts; and "there He will meet, to speak unto thee," with every one of the children of His Israel; and "the tabernacle shall be sanctified with His glory." "Shalt thou not build a house for me to dwell in?" saith the Lord.

"Hearken unto me, my people! and give ear unto me, O my nation! for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth; and mine arms shall judge the people. The isles" — the least little separate places —

"shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust; the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment"; all these things that seem unchangeable, unconquerable, shall be made to pass away; "and they that dwell *therein*," and not in me, "shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, — the people in whose heart is my law!"

After the benediction there was a little waiting, as there always is in a country church, when the menfolks have to go to the sheds for their wagons, and the women have each other and the minister to speak to; for after sermon, the country minister comes really into the midst of his people; the old women and the little Sunday-school children are about him. The Sunday-school will assemble directly, and the old women who have come "some ways," as they say of distance, have their baskets of luncheon, and will stay over the nooning for the afternoon service.

Mr. Kingsworth, coming down from his slight external height and separation, had these people, to whom every Sunday was in this way a communion, to join his hand to and to say his word with: they had looked forward to it all the week, and would think of it all the week after. He visited them in their houses faithfully, and his coming was a festival to some of their hearts. But this coming down direct from the Mount of Teaching, — it was as if the gift of especial healing and help were in his first touch, as it was in the hand of the Lord, when he came down from the Transfiguration.

He made no haste for his own, — to get that clasp of the hand, and that recognition in the eyes, shining already with the beautiful joy of her listening, that from France Everidge was a beginning of what his aloneness here had craved; he would miss it altogether, rather than let one of his poorest parishioners miss half a glance from her share of him to-day. But the pew-door was near the front; they were soon face to face; the shining look gave him thanks more than it knew, and more, possibly, in its gladness, than it would have meant, if it had known. Her

hand rested an instant in his while she said, "This is my father, Mr. Kingsworth"; and the two gentlemen exchanged courteous greetings. Then the little tide in the aisle crept, with a fresh movement, a few paces onward, and they were gone, and Bernard Kingsworth was left to his old women and his little children.

Rael drove the horses home; Mr. Everidge sat in front with him.

"That was a surprising sermon your minister gave us today," he said to the young farmer.

"Yes, sir," Rael answered. "Surprisingness is exactly the quality of Mr. Kingsworth. He seems to tell us everything, almost, there is to tell in every sermon; but the next time, there is everything again, in a new way, from some new lookout. No matter what his text is, he touches the very middle point always. His Pyramid is always in the centre of the whole earth."

Rael made his allusion with a smile, as he glanced at Mr. Everidge, not doubting, probably, that a man like him knew all about the pyramids, and the last interpretation of them.

But Mr. Everidge was surprised again; and there was as much blankness in his return glance as a gentleman used to polite conversation ever lets appear. "I was *going* to say," he remarked, with a slight emphasis, that confessed the changed impression of the last half minute, "that I should think such preaching was rather shooting over the heads of a good many of his people."

"In that kind of shooting," Rael replied, "it 's hard to shoot over a man's head, if you once get it lifted up. And that 's what Mr. Kingsworth's surprises do for us. A man's measure in some things, I take it, is made to be about the same, is n't it?"

This time, Mr. Everidge fairly turned round for reinforcement. "What do you say, Fran'? Do you think they all took it in? and where do you suppose the young man himself got it all, and will any of it be lived out, here in Fellaiden?"

"About *all* I can't say, papa, till I 've got where Mr. Kingsworth saw it. The beginning was Miss Ammah's bread cast upon the waters. She gave him the text."

"I never did in the world!" Miss Ammah contradicted, amazedly. And then, with the easiest inconsistency, demanded, "When?"

"Down at home, last spring, one morning at our breakfast-table, when you asked me to come up here with you. Don't you remember the 'betweens' and the 'middling,' when you said papa was a grocer?"

Miss Ammah looked sharply at her. "H'm! and you've been telling him that! How came you round to it?"

"It happened so," said France quietly.

And then her father said again, "I wonder if he brings them up to his standard here? Will anybody trade stock or sell crop accordingly?"

"I have known dealing done here, in Fellaiden, accordingly," said France. And a proud inflection threw itself up in her clear voice.

"Then the man lost who did it," said Mr. Everidge.

"No, he only paid what the thing was worth. I mean, he told the man what the thing was worth that he wanted to buy; and it was more than he might have had it for."

"And did n't get it, of course. There never would be two such parties to a bargain. It 's precisely what you can't depend upon. The world is n't made so yet, as your preacher confessed. An offer to pay more than a man had expected works his price right up another notch; an offer to sell as low as can be afforded runs your property down below affording. You can't help it. Everybody understands. There 's a way of talking in trade, and it won't do to invent a new one. It is like phonetics in spelling: the old fashion may be really more trouble in itself, but it 's a worse confusion to change. Matters come round to pretty much the same point, either way. There 's an actual value in things that business men know, or ought to; and there need n't be cheating: but there must be judgment and keeping your own counsel, or there would n't be business. He was all right as to principle; but the method can't be altered by one here and there, any more than spelling or language. Custom is the language of life. If a man undertakes to stand by himself, he 's simply an odd one. He does n't

fit in anywhere, and he does n't count. He can't do any good."

"I beg your pardon," said the young farmer at his side. "But *don't* odd numbers count? The number that begins or advances is odd, in the order of numbers. It is the coming up that makes even, and the odd numbers were the sacred numbers. It seems as if there were something in that."

Mr. Everidge laughed. "I see he has got *you*," he said; "and I am afraid you did n't get your bargain."

"I have n't *lost* any bargain, sir," Rael answered, with a curious, fine ring in his tone, the antiphon, perhaps, to the clear, sweet pride that had been in France's. And at that moment they drove up to the farmhouse door.

"There was another thing," observed Mr. Everidge, as he and Miss Ammah walked through upon the west piazza. "He made very little account of civilization. Now a decent man *is* an advance upon the brute, and the proprieties of life are a certain sort of religion. People are bound to something by them, and kept out of something. If it were n't for good breeding, I don't know where Christianity would be."

"Put it the other way," said Miss Ammah. "If it were n't for Christianity, where would good breeding be?"

"The old Greeks and the Romans had something of it, I fancy."

"Yes, a kind that made place for pretty much everything that breaks the ten commandments. And I don't know that our good breeding, taken by itself, does much better. There 's room in it for nearly what you please. Why, we should all be scratching like cats, for all good breeding, if there were n't very polite ways provided for expressing the same emotions."

"O, I hope not," Mr. Everidge said, in the laughing tone with which men dismiss a woman's extreme but keen retort, and walking with a certain unrest of manner up and down the short piazza-floor. "That 's the right kind of preaching, though," he resumed, with a conceding seriousness. "If people heard it all the time, it would insensibly raise the standard. But no one man can raise it single-handed and at a jump."

Evidently the preaching was a difficult thing to be quite disposed of.

Up in the little shed-chamber, Sarell Gately was laying away her hat and her Sunday ribbons. The many-pointed sermon had had its point for her; and she was, at the same time, laying away its application, to which she had arrived in her mind during the ride home, not hearing or attending to, in the rumbling of the big wagon, all that was being said so far forward of her. She had just precisely her own question to settle, not the principles of trade.

"It 's the folks," she remarked up here to herself, "that I care about fust 'n foremost, an' the fairness: I know that. An' then, p'raps, it 's the satisfaction, too. What 'd be th' use o' bein' smart otherways? But, ef 't war n't too *awful* small a chink, an' ef I *could* git b'tween Mother Pemble herself an' the very ol' Sat'n of it all, — well, I 'd jest like t' do 'gzac'ly the smartest thing that could be did; an' I guess that 'd be about it, sure enough? How'ver, I 've got t' ketch her fust, any way. It 's all one road, t'll I git that fur."

And Sarell pinned her clean bib-apron to her shoulders, and took her way downstairs. It was comfortable that the light upon her path showed no doubtful fork in the road immediately before her feet.

France, looking in her glass as she removed veil and bonnet, saw a face glowing yet rose-red, and two eyes shining in the glow like morning stars. She could not help being glad to be so pretty; but she would not look again or think about it now.

She had been glad of such nobler things, she would not descend to any petty "midst" of self. She would not spend that "foolish" half-minute, even, that would take a crumb of the bread she had been fed with, and fling it to the dogs.

She had listened to the brave, lovely truth: was that all?

She had set it side by side, as it was told, with a brave, lovely doing of the truth. She *would* be proud of that. What should hinder? Rael Heybrook was her friend, she could understand him. She thought the more, not the less, of herself for that.

She intrenched herself so resolutely beside Miss Ammah. Miss Ammah liked, praised Rael. Where the woman could stand, the girl could.

She hated so those two whispering, stinging words, "propinquity," "infatuation." Nobody could apply them to Miss Ammah.

With this piece of sweet-clover shrub she armed herself, to keep off biting insects; and bearing it, she drifted peacefully on into her intangible dreams.

CHAPTER XXII.

MONDAY.

It really seemed as if all Fellaiden had been waiting for him. What would it have done, if he had not come there for those three days? And surely in this country nook there was no end of surprises.

When Mr. Everidge came out from his breakfast on the Monday morning, there stood Flip Merriweather on the front door-stone, waiting to secure an early word with him.

Not in his Sunday best, he knew better than that. He had lifted his white Sunday straw hat to the merchant, standing on the church steps yesterday: he had taken care to let him see the country youth as he *could* present himself. To-day, he was not in shirtsleeves and big field hat, but in a suit of clothes and head-gear something between these and the evident get-up of rest-days or dress-days. He took his hat off as Mr. Everidge came through the hall, held it without fumbling, and raised his eyes without abashment to the gentleman's face. He knew better than to be confused or to hesitate.

He had been very bright, knowing, agreeable on Saturday. He had asked intelligent questions, and listened intelligently and attentively to replies. He had fished for trout, he had caught trout. If he had fished for anything else, he had shown neither hook nor line.

This morning he came with a straight errand. He had found out how a man like Mr. Everidge would like to be approached, if approached at all.

"I don't want to take up your time, sir," he said. "I came to ask something that can be asked in half a minute. I want a chance in the city; to learn business, and get it. I want

you to find, if you can, a corner among your workers that you can put me into, to work and learn. I don't care if it 's a coal-corner, if I can only get further some time. I 've got money enough to keep me for a year, and I don't ask pay. But I want to get out into the channel; I 've been up the creek long enough."

"Is this a new idea? Is it my coming that has put it into your head?"

"No, sir. I 've been waiting for my opportunity, and studying out how I could possibly make it. Now, if it 's come, I won't lose it for want of finding it out."

Mr. Everidge liked this. Flip knew he would, and meant he should. He stood perfectly still, held his hat still, and kept his eyes on the merchant's face.

"Do your friends know?"

"They know what I want, and mean. I 've only my sister and her husband, Doctor Fargood. He can tell you about me. I 'm with them till I can do more."

It happened that a young shipping-clerk of Everidge & Co.'s was just now in rather failing health. He would, probably, not hold out at his work through a Boston winter; he might do something in their employ in the West Indies; meanwhile, it had already occurred to Mr. Everidge that it was time to put another in the line of training. He reconsidered this, in a new connection; ran over the brief promotion list in his mind, and settled where a wide-awake fellow like this might fit himself, in a few months, to drop in. He was silent for just about the half minute that corresponded to Flip's; then he said, right out, and at once, "I like your way. I 've no doubt I could do something with you. I 'll put you on the wharf, under one of my shippers, and you may see what you can learn, and how fast you can come up to it. There 's enough to do. I 'll give you five dollars a week, at first; then, when you 're worth more, I 'll pay you by the month; and if you prove yourself worth while, in six months I 'll put you on a year's engagement and salary, at five hundred dollars. You 'll earn that, if you 're any use at all."

Flip could n't help the flash in his eye; but he kept it steady,

while he said, "Thank you, sir, heartily; it 's more than I expected."

"When will you be ready?"

"I 'm ready now."

"Go down with me to-morrow, then."

And Philip Merriweather bowed, and departed from the presence a made man. He walked quietly across the yard and roadway; when he had disappeared behind the hay and corn-barns, he cast one quick glance around the fields, then dropped himself upon hands and feet, and turned three or four cart-wheels of pure boy-joy. After that, he picked up his hat, left the boy forever behind him, as if then and there and by that ceremony, he had cast the slough, and marched down the Great Mowing, not looking round, or caring who there might be to see him as he went.

France got her father to herself for the rest of the forenoon; she had him about with her in all her nearer haunts; they were both very happy.

France told him about her friends; she did n't say quite so much about Rael as she had meant to say; but she set forth the household life and character, and the oneness of Miss Ammah with it, and her active interest. She told all about the Gilley bargain; she knew it had been partly explained already, and that it was no secret. Mr. Everidge acknowledged that there was common sense between the high morality of the transaction and utter Quixotism; he thought very well of young Heybrook. He thought well of that other fellow, also, Merriweather; he knew what he was about; he was going to give him a chance with himself. France was really glad; she was proud of her father's power and generosity.

The sermon sat more comfortably to-day in Mr. Everidge's mind; he had "stood between" to some kind and efficient purpose, this morning. As he reviewed his career in the light of this reminder, he recalled many places where he had so stood between; many a comfortable independence, some rising fortunes, that owed their beginnings to him. A business man had opportunities; certainly he was responsible for them.

Other and opposite satisfactions recurred to him, occasions

when he had hindered or discouraged what might have led to risk or loss for others; as he had done, or thought he had done, with Miss Ammah herself, but two days since. A little older instance was in his mind, for which he took to himself especial credit.

"Women and children should n't meddle with dangerous machinery," he said to himself. "They 're sure to take their fingers off in a hay-cutter."

They talked a little about the minister. France spoke of him as she felt. "I think there is n't one man in a hundred like him," she said.

"Then why on earth does he stay up here, in this corner?" asked the man of values and markets.

"I believe he is quite able to stay where he likes best," said France. "And he seems to have chosen to stay here; at least, now. I should think anybody who could might choose to stay here, papa!"

"Then you 're not ready to go home with me?"

"You did n't come for me? You did n't say so!"

"And you did n't ask. I knew very well it would n't do to risk my authority! But my little Fran' must n't get weaned altogether away from us!" and he laid his hand, fatherly-loving, upon her shoulder.

France was furious with herself for coloring up so. There was neither reason nor connection in it. She put her hand up and laid it upon his, but she kept her head so that her shade hat shielded her face from him, and she hoped he had not noticed it.

She spied a four-leaved clover, as she looked downward on the grass. She sprang away from him to pick it. Then she came back and made him a little presentation of it. "It was growing hot," she said. "Should they walk back toward the house?"

They had all the Great Mowing to climb, from the shady brookside. It was just a little breathless, in the eleven o'clock sun; and they did not talk much more by the way.

In the afternoon came Bernard Kingsworth, with his light buggy and his little Morgan. He came to ask Mr. Everidge to

drive with him to the High Mills Village, and around by the "Under-Mountain Road," beneath the precipices of Thumble, to the East Hills and the ravines, and back over Fellaiden Height.

Before Mr. Everidge had made the circuit, he had seen enough to modify his idea of the "corner," and his question as to how a man, "like whom there was not one in a hundred," should choose to stay in it. It would seem to be just that sort of a man, indeed, for whom it was worth while to have been made. He had, also, received his fourth surprise.

On the homeward turn, while they were slowly descending the steep terraces from the Centre Village, with the grand outspread before them of six hill-ranges, from the dusk of the overlapping slopes of Heybrook Farm to the high, pale, misty blue of the Vermont peaks, up and down whose indented horizon-line the sun travels his clear-traced path from solstice to solstice through the year, Bernard Kingsworth spoke of that which he had but just begun to read, in any word-shape, in his own mind. The last two days had been full days, days of revealing; and by Mr. Everidge's sudden appearance, the young minister was made all at once to see himself in a very definite light, — a light in which, now that he had come, he felt bound to show himself to France's father.

"I cannot let you go away, Mr. Everidge," he began, after a few moments' silence, as they came over the crown of the hill, "without saying something to you that it may seem very precipitate, almost presumptuous, to say, seeing that you have only known of my existence these two days."

The merchant wondered. Was it to be a piece of evangelizing? Was the gospel to be "brought home to him," after what he had heard was the fashion in primitive Puritan places? He hoped this young man, who had preached such a strong sermon yesterday, was not going to stultify his work to-day with any such bad taste. He had had a conversation with him that he had thoroughly enjoyed; many things — among the rest, Philip Merriweather and his new prospects and interests, of which Mr. Kingsworth had spoken with the clearest good sense, with the sort of sympathy and perception, also, that were consistent

with his character and relation to the youth, yet without a particle of cant or prejudice — had come up for mention and discussion between them; and every word of the young minister's might have been said by one quite unprofessional, yet would not have been said by any one of a less noble type of manhood.

Now, what, all at once, did this peculiar, personal exordium preface?

Mr. Everidge sat quite silent, leaving the burden of whatever it might be altogether to his companion.

"Your coming is a part of the event," the young man said. "It puts me in a position which makes that binding upon me which I might not yet have felt bound to seek. I do not know yet my own chances of hope in it. I have only made sure that I do hope for it, more earnestly than I ever before desired any earthly thing. Not an earthly thing, either. Mr. Everidge, may I ask your daughter if she can care for me as I care for her?"

A positive swift pain contracted Mr. Everidge's forehead, and even whitened suddenly about his lips. Nobody had come and asked for something right out of his very heart before. His little Fran'? The girl that was just older than his little children, and not grown, he had thought, to the womanhood of the elder ones, that had somehow separated them a good deal from him? His one safe, sole, especial daughter? Let it come from whom it would, it was a blow.

He could not help Bernard Kingsworth's perceiving that. He did not care to. He did not speak a word for many seconds; then he said briefly, though the saying came slowly, "I have only known of you, as you say, for these two days."

"Yes," said Bernard Kingsworth. "It seems almost like highway robbery, I know. But I had it to tell you." And a smile, that was very gentle in its comprehension of the other's feeling, just moved his lip, while his tone was at once tender and strong.

"I beg your pardon. Of course, I can see what you are, Mr. Kingsworth. *This*, however! There are many things — "

"I could take care of her. She should never miss anything she ought not to miss."

"It is n't that, altogether," said Mr. Everidge hastily. "A man's instinct is to repudiate calculation, when the question is of a man, who *is* a man, giving his whole self, with all, be it more or less, that he may have, be, or can do, and only beseeching a girl that she will take him. And yet the question has to be of money also, and the difference that money or no money makes." So Mr. Everidge added honestly his "altogether." "But her life has been so different. She has had so little time. I can't wish that the subject should be brought to her just yet, in any way. I can't spare her, yet, to anybody! I wish you had not asked me this, Mr. Kingsworth."

Mr. Kingsworth kept silence for a minute or two. Then he said, "Put yourself in my place. Could I have done otherwise?"

"Why must the man *be* in his place?" was the impatient mental response; but Mr. Everidge knew he was unreasonable. He waited again a little before replying.

In the five minutes already since the shock came, it had begun, as all shocks do, to grow familiar. He began to see the other side of it. It was like the mountain they had just come round, — a long, green slope on one hand, on the other, an instant, precipitous plunge.

Bernard Kingsworth had had all summer for this fact to grow in him; there were only these five minutes for him to declare it in. Five minutes, in which, so independent is fact of time, it had been able to become almost as an old matter to himself.

A great deal had been able to pass through his mind, and range itself about it, giving it established place and relation. The swift resistance of his own feeling, the reaction to a fair acknowledgment of what was due, not only to this gentleman, but to his daughter — how did he know what the summer had wrought in her also? The first impulse to carry her directly away with him, out of this threat, this danger; the recollection that if the mischief were done, that would be of no use, and if not done, the very best thing would be for Bernard Kingsworth to find it out, and not be coming down after her to Boston; where, with longer time, it might befall.

He began to be rather glad, upon the whole, that the man was in what looked to himself such a hurry; he had confessed that he knew nothing of his own chances; he could not have gone far, nor France have met him with much consciousness or encouragement. Now, with the permission he was asking for, he must speak, and get his answer.

But his France, up here, in this little farming parish, the parson's wife, on, probably, something like six hundred dollars a year!

"It was n't that, altogether," indeed! but he began, on that point of it, to feel, certainly, a little angry.

He hoped to leave her ten times as many thousands, some day; but it was all afloat in his ships and business now; even this last fine return of speculation could hardly be counted as a thing to be abstracted and divided. He could do better by her, doubtless, in consequence; but there were five of them; and as long as a man lives, and continues business operations, all he may have is never too much for foundation and moving capital.

"I see," he answered aloud, after all this had been flashing through him in such space as he could leave Mr. Kingsworth absolutely unanswered. "You have known her all summer, and I you but two days. Allow, merely, for the difference." And he smiled in his turn. "After all, it must rest with her, other things being proved possible. I do not see, since the question has come to exist between you, but you will have to ask it of her. — Only — I can't give my little girl up to any hardship. I am trying my best to earn a hundred thousand dollars for her, before I die."

It was in this way, scarcely a bad one, on the whole, that he managed to put forth that ugly money consideration, which must always be a consideration.

Mr. Kingsworth smiled; it was a pleasant, easy play of face, but moved from no such depth as it had been before.

"I hope you may," he said, "if you desire it. But meanwhile, a good long meanwhile, I hope again — she will — would — not need it. I have a hundred thousand dollars of my own."

He said it as quietly as if he might have said his little parsonage house was a very comfortable one.

Mr. Everidge was exceedingly glad of having spoken in precisely the order that he had; it would have been awkward if his proviso had drawn forth this information before he had given any other sort of answer.

Even then there had been nothing said of General Kingsworth, the uncle in Montreal. Nor was there, although Bernard told him, briefly, that his ties of kindred was very few; an only sister, younger than himself, being all that was left of his immediate family, their parents having died in his own boyhood and the daughter's babyhood.

There remained something for Miss Ammah to add, when Mr. Everidge talked with her about it for a few minutes in the evening, managing to keep her for that purpose, after he had bidden France good-night, and while he smoked a supplementary half cigar.

On the other hand, Miss Ammah herself had known nothing of the amount of Bernard Kingsworth's present independence.

"I will have nothing mentioned of the matter, though," Mr. Everidge concluded. "I shall tell nobody at home. Fran' shall do as she pleases; and I sincerely hope she will please to belong to me for a dozen years to come. How coolly these young fellows step up to ask you for your daughters! as if you could have no further use for them yourself!"

"That 's a piece of the making of the world, or the keeping up of it," said Miss Ammah. "That 's where you are only a between again."

And, as usual, she had the last word of it. Mr. Everidge flung the end of his cigar away into the grass, and went off to bed.

So the Monday was over, and the Tuesday came; Mr. Everidge went back to the city and his counting-room, taking Flip with him; and France was left, with even a tenderer good-by kiss than usual from her father, but all unknowing why, and to what he left her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLANS, A PLOT, AND A PLEADING.

THE next was a week of glowing, thundery weather, — short, sharp flashes of storm, between fervid noons and superb, sweet sunsets. Mrs. Heybrook was still "overdoin'"; but where so many people underdo, there remains nothing but that such as she should carry the giant's end of the tree while the lazy dwarfs sit chirrupping in the branches. A demand came from East Hollow for a two days' loan of Sarell. Elviry was away; Care'line was "all beat out with the work and the thunder." Farmer Heybrook looked sober; Israel frowned; Mother Heybrook "did n't know how," and then, as usual, consented without knowing. That same day occurred the severest, and the last, of the thunder-gusts. We shall hear more of it elsewhere. The minister had not yet been at West Side.

In the serene afternoon of the day succeeding the tempest France ventured a long walk again. She went with Miss Ammah and Rael over to the Gilley Place.

There is a great charm in going over a pleasant, empty dwelling. One fills it with all the possibilities.

The Gilleys had been gone several days; the thing had been said and done together. They had not had much to take away; there had not been much to dispose of. They had sold some things; some things had been given away; Miss Ammah had paid good prices — not the prices fashionable collectors pay up in the country where the value of the fashion has not come — for some solid, ancient pieces of furniture, that were still standing in their places, where they had been for three quarters of a century. Otherwise, all was empty and swept out; for Miss Ammah always cleared up as she went, and she had had women cleaning there within an hour after the final departure. The

better rooms had hardly been used for years; these last Gilleys had bivouacked in the shed portion, and that was all to be taken down. Miss Ammah meant to have mechanics there at once, to do all that could be well done before winter, so as to close it safely, and leave it in the nearest possible readiness for what she would do by and by. It was about these things she wanted to consult Rael.

France also; "You must come and tell me about colors and finishings," she said. "Things might as well be pretty, when they 've got to be something; especially, when you don't believe in rooting up every five years to make over in some last sort of prettiness. I 've got a real handsome old foundation. Those Gilleys have been living anyhow; but the house was built by people who lived *some*how."

So it was. It was not large, but it had an expression of largeness; the hallway ran straight through, and so did the morning or the afternoon sun when east or west doors were opened; the stair sloped leisurely up along one whole side; the rooms were low, square, heavily raftered, plentifully windowed; there was a kind of broad, pleasant proportion in them that struck the feeling at once. Everything was solid, enduring: mere surface neglect or misuse could not spoil that; these were easily obliterated and replaced with improvement.

Wall-papers were queer enough, soiled enough, tattered enough; but the high wainscots, with their grooved and fluted cornices, were of real old hardwoods, and around the ceilings ran beautiful quaint mouldings in high fret-bars and billets and corbels; all plain, simple, and heavy, belonging to the far-back time when people did things simply, but put into them such ampleness and genuineness of material, such patience of time and labor, as made them rich. No wear or defacement had reached these adornments in all the years that they had been so incongruous with the shifty, scrambling, fugacious living below. France and Miss Ammah looked at them with delight.

"Why, it 's all done!" said France.

"Fifty years ago," said Miss Ammah, "it was fine to get rid of all these beams and corner-posts and to have flat surfaces

and smooth plaster finish. Now people are tearing down their plaster and filling their rooms up with timbers that had nothing to do with the original building. Just as they pretend with gas-logs for wood fires, and set up spinning-wheels in the corners when they don't know a flyer from a distaff, or whether they 've all the pieces that belong or not."

"If I were going to build a house, though, Miss Ammah, I would build it like this," said France.

"You would!" said Miss Ammah, and looked pleased. "I don't know that I would, though," she added. "I think it 's good to be true to one's times. When people built like this they had plenty of timber, and not plenty of ways and works such as we have got since. Now we have the works and ways, and not the timber. It 's an extravagant luxury, merely, if you put it in. So I 'm not sure about the business we have with it."

"You must be glad this has happened so at any rate," said France; and then they went to the plans and the colors.

There was a little southwest chamber, all sunshine, that France said should be painted in pale, cool blue, and have one of those lovely new blue-checked mattings on the floor. Then there was another in a north angle that should be in delicious buff, with a thread-line of vermilion "to *make* sunshine." The dark, "real" woods in the large rooms should be cleansed and polished only, of course.

Between two of the chief apartments on the south side was an included platform or roofed portico, upon which a door at either end opened. This Miss Ammah said she would have inclosed with glass and made warm for plants, and for a pleasant connecting gallery to sit in in the winter. From this one looked straight across the Heybrook slopes to the grand height of Thumble. The Gilley house stood upon a ledge, higher yet than those intervening uplands.

To the west, where the hall door opened, all those lovely hill outlines swept and rolled away, with the soft haze of the great river valley veiling the mountain swells beyond. It was the beauty of Heybrook hillside, widened.

"I should like to see this in the winter, with the snow," said France, standing there with Rael Heybrook beside her, "and

your plants in the little glass gallery. Why, Miss Ammah!" she exclaimed with sudden inference that had not struck her before, "do you really *mean* ever to be here in the winter?"

"Somebody will, after I 've set the house going," said Miss Ammah, "and I shall know it *is* here. I like to know there is a place away from hotels and visitings. I never had one before."

"I wish I were as old as you are, Miss Ammah," said France.

"That 's wishing *me* comfortably under the daisies," returned the elder lady.

"No. I might wish to change places with you. I should like to be able to choose my place, as you can."

"Maybe I should like to choose my place, as you can," said Miss Ammah. "No, France Everidge, we should n't either of us like it. You, and I too, would rather do our own going without than anybody else's having."

France stood still and silent. The sun was striking level now. It shone rosy upon her, and in at the doorway behind, lighting up the old pleasant hall. It shone upon Rael Heybrook too; it seemed suddenly to light them up to each other. Miss Ammah was below in the shadow of a maple-tree that, itself all tipped with fire by the first ripeness of autumn, filled the right-hand corner of the dooryard.

"I suppose Mr. Kingsworth would say," said Rael, "that we could n't go without, without having had in some sense already."

"Why don't you say it yourself, Mr. Rael?" France asked, turning to him quickly. She meant why did n't he assume his own perception, instead of attributing it to one who he fancied might more properly assume.

Israel answered her almost as quickly. "I do say it!" and he looked down at her from his fine height as she lifted her eyes toward him. "I do say that I would rather go without the best that has ever come to me to know of than never to have known anything about it."

He might mean a score of things, — opportunity, knowledge, life among men of knowledge, a breadth of action that he could plan or imagine; perhaps he thought he did mean them all.

But the sunlight, like the truth, shot them through and

through. Something warmed at both their hearts, though each but felt it for each self, and only saw the other standing in the splendor.

Coming down, they met Bernard Kingsworth at the foot of the hill, where they struck out upon the roadway. He was going down to the farm. They paired for the remainder of the walk, — Mr. Kingsworth with France, Miss Ammah with Israel. Miss Ammah had been very shy of any *tête-à-tête* with Bernard all the week; it was very much as if she were afraid of an offer to herself. She was afraid of being appealed to; she thought the next step on Bernard Kingsworth's part would very likely be to say something to her. She had kept close to France when France was by; she had chaperoned herself so effectually that she had quite effectually defended the girl also.

They were in the valley now, the comparative valley between these high tops of two of the multitudinous hills; the light was dimming, and that quick chill was falling that does drop so instantly below the heights.

France was pale; she was tired with her long walk. Mr. Kingsworth offered her his arm. No, she thanked him; her stick was a good help.

Rael had cut the stick for her to come down the hill with. She had refused his arm also. She would take nobody's arm.

Sarell, just returned, met them in the dooryard; it was past the tea time, all was ready on the table, and Sarell said a word privately to France as they passed in at the porchway. France said it again to Miss Ammah upstairs, and they hurried in, taking off their hats.

Mr. Kingsworth sat by at the tea-drinking; he had had his own early, at the parsonage. He had supposed he was coming for an early evening call.

They managed the meal speedily; it was so pleasant on the piazza, the after-light was coming on, and the two ladies had had that transmitted little word.

But Miss Ammah was left alone with the minister this time. France slipped away into the kitchen, and Miss Ammah, after that whisper, had not a word to say in her hindrance.

Mrs. Heybrook was in her bedroom.

So France was there with Sarell when Rael came in with the milk-pails. Sarell was putting the last clean cups on the tray. She had been very quick with the dish-washing. Perhaps one reason for that appeared in a couple of damp towels that France, sitting by the corner of the table, had not yet laid out of her hands. She hung them on a low rack at the table end as Rael entered.

"Don't lisp it," Sarell had just said in a whisper. "It 's *too* bad, comin' right on top o' the other, but I *must;* I 'll be back 'fore she knows it in the mornin'. An' the bread c'n wait. You sh'll hev cream-biscuit f'r breakfuss, an' there 'll be a biled brown loaf f'r dinner. 'T ain't anything 't I c'n help, y' see. Time an' tide an' babies waits f'r nobody's lezhure. Slim chance f'r em 'f the' did."

"Has mother come home?" asked Rael, going through.

"Yiss, she hez," Sarell whispered at him in a forcible manner, with a side-reach toward him over her shoulder as she wrung her dishcloth. "She 's come home with a headache, an' I 've made her go to bed; an' the smarter she 's let alone, the smarter she 'll git up in the mornin'. You 'd as good 's keep out o' the kitchen, ef y' can, an' keep th' rest out."

Rael passed on quietly into the buttery with his milk; they heard him pour it softly into the pans. Sarell slipped up the shed-way stairs to her own chamber. France sat still in the still kitchen. The girl came down in a minute with shawl and straw hat on and went quickly out the back way. Her sister lived half a mile off, across the hills; and a little soul, not waiting for anybody's leisure, was coming into the world to-night. She forgot the milk-pails that wanted scalding. Rael had set them down so gently that there was no clatter to remind her; then he had gone away again toward the barns.

France made sure of that; then she lifted a tin kettle of hot water from the stove, and went round into the buttery. She scalded the pails, rubbed them bright with a clean towel she found there, and set them ready for the morning milking.

A certain odd delight touched her, doing this homely work, as if she had been a sister in the house. "How pleasantly these farm-people help one another, and take the work up from each other's hands!" she thought. "It seems as if

their life together must mean more than ours does, sitting in our drawing-rooms."

She had left Mr. Kingsworth and Miss Ammah together a good while. Perhaps she had been partly not unwilling, for that very reason, to make herself helpful to-night to Sarell. Most people have their moods. France certainly had hers.

Perhaps Mr. Kingsworth's being there may have been partly a reason, also, why Rael went off into the barns again. The minister was his friend, but he wanted to think things over just now that he was not quite ready to talk of.

Mr. Heybrook and Lyman were out by the north-lot fence, talking about to-morrow's work. Rael said something to them as he went by. France found herself left quite alone, — the "men-folks" not gathering, as they were wont to do, in the broad shed-stoop. Something new came into her head.

"What is the use of waiting till it happens, and then not being let?" she said. "I 'll do it once, any way. I 'll take what Mr. Rael calls the 'advantage.'"

The yeast-jug was in the buttery by the cool window; she knew the way to the flour-barrel; the bread-pan was in the pantry. She had watched Mrs. Heybrook at her mixing a dozen times. She gathered all in the outer room, she turned her muslin sleeves up to the shoulders, and pinned them there. In five minutes she was rolling and coaxing, with some distant respect certainly, lest she should get deeper in than seemed nice to her, a mass of clean, soft dough upon the moulding-board. She touched her hands softly to the sifted flour, she took a pretty way of her own with the working, she beckoned with her finger-tips, she rolled lightly off with bended wrists, she rounded up again with rounded palms, she grew bold and intimate in her touch only as she found out her control, and that the globe she was shaping grew coherent with itself, and she could keep dry out of chaos. She felt a splendid power and independence all at once. It was a grand thing to make bread. That was what always broke down at home when the cook went.

Bread and butter! What queens these country house-wives were, with their pure, sweet churnings and their delicate bakings!

Her spirit and enterprise rose audaciously. Already a perfectly intrepid notion seized her. It drove out of her head what she had been thinking while she wiped up the dishes.

About Bernard Kingsworth, and why she was not always more glad to see him; why some curious little difference in him the last few times they had met had wrought a difference in her that she could not help, and made her seem again, and more than ever, to hold him in two quite separate places in her mind, the one becoming almost antagonistic to the other. Why, with all his uplifting and that touch of his thought that kindled hers so swiftly into enthusiasm, with all she knew of his good and noble life here, with all that the height of her caught and reflected, as the hill-tops caught the sunlight, she was more comfortable to have it all come, as the sunlight comes, through a certain atmosphere of distance, and without reminder that there was anything else but that pure, ineffable outshining in his whole being and existence. Why was she fancifully impatient of that black coat of his, and the very tie of his cravat, and of noticing the cut of his shoes and the little rim of dust that gathered on them in his long walk over the hill down here to see them?

Why, — a sudden recollection of him sitting out there with Miss Ammah brought the whys all up again, and mixed them with her bread-mixing now, notwithstanding her fine, bold plan that had just scattered them, — why were not the little personalities about him, — the personalities of a gentleman, — why were not the ways of his speech and movement, instinct always with the sincerity and strength and nobleness that she felt sure of in him, so interesting to her as — for instance — Rael Heybrook's plain, bravely-worn working-dress, his honest word, a little reserved with proud humility, his delicate act and ready courage, his quiet waiting and patience and self-training, his manly upreaching in the midst of common toil, forced her to acknowledge them to be?

She would not come nearer home than that. She would not ask why she had sung in the boat with Rael, when she had only felt that shadow of a calm protection, that thrill of the spirit rather than of a girl's heart, as she stood by Bernard Kings-

worth under the coming storm, or sat by his side in the little tent among the birches and cedars.

She set one off against the other; she put one in the other's place, and asked herself questions.

Those subtile delicacies that she had known the young farmer show, would n't Mr. Kingsworth have shown them too? Would n't he have helped her down from the mowing-machine, and walked up the hill with her, that day, ignoring the prank of it and her torn gown? Certainly, he was a gentleman bred. But here was a gentleman born. To be born and bred *among* gentlefolks unfortunately takes away the chance of proving this so conspicuously. She settled that point that way.

And then, for bravery. Suppose Mr. Kingsworth had been driving her down those ledges when the polestrap broke? He would have behaved well. She had no idea that he was a physical any more than a moral coward. He had faced lightning serenely; but she could not exactly imagine him flinging himself down into the *melée* of hoofs and wheels, as Rael had done. He would have gone to the bottom of the hill with her probably, and met fate like a Christian. Well? Yes, that would be splendid, in its way, too, but she liked Rael's way.

Liked? Something touched her sharply at that word. Nevertheless, her thought hurried itself on.

Mr. Kingsworth would be uncorrupt in his integrity, that was beyond the saying. In such a matter as that bargain, now, he would be as fair as daylight, as fair as Rael. Well? Why could n't she care so very much about it, if he would.

Care? Then she argued deliberately.

"I suppose it must be because it is all of course with a clergyman. You expect him to be up. I don't suppose an angel would make me feel as an angel-like mortal would. Climbing is always finer than being on the top, one knows not how. It is like the people in social places earned or made for them somehow beforehand, compared with the middle ones that are doing the things that are making the places for by and by. I suppose nothing ever is at the very topmost; but if it pretends to be, you despise it; and if you fancy it is, it does n't seem to take hold of you anywhere. It is the very reason of the

'coming down into the midst' that he told us about the other day. The Lord Himself had to come down into the middle, between His own self and us, or we should never have found our way — "

That was where she stopped thinking altogether. She found herself where it hardly seemed lawful to be.

So she punched her finger into her bread-ball, now, as she had seen Mrs. Heybrook do, and it made a clean drill-hole; and she knew that the kneading was done. She covered it up with a large cloth, fresh from the line, gathered her things tidily together and left them so, slid off through the house and upstairs, washed her hands, turned down her sleeves, came down and out at the front door, and went after Lyman. "It 's a good thing I 've got my feet again," she said.

But when she found Lyman up by the turkey-coops, she was glad to sit down on a rock that sloped out from the old garden wall.

"I 've got a plot, Lyman," she said, "and you 're in it."

"Give me my latitude and longitude, then," said Lyman, putting one knee up on the low stones near her, and sitting sidewise upon them.

"The long and short of it, that is," said France. "Well; there *is* a long and a broad. It 's serious, and it 's good fun. The serious part is, your mother 's tired out; and if we don't make a chance for her to be sick in, if she wants to, she 'll be sick without any chance at all."

"I 've seen it," said Lyme; and his voice had the longitude in it; the almost invariable fun was quite dropped out.

"It would worry and disappoint her if we were to go away; and besides that, she has nursed us both, and now it 's our turn. To-morrow is butter-day."

"By George, it is! And father and I had laid out to go and cut that bass-wood, and get it to the saw-mill, so as to have it drying out for the finish of the new shed-chamber we 're going to fix up next spring."

"Could you get up at three o'clock in the morning?"

"I reckon. Why?"

"Because I could. And because I can work butter. I 've

done it, a little, for fun, and now I want to do the whole of it, in earnest. I 'd like to know, and to establish the self-evidence, that I 'm equal to the responsibility of bread and butter. If you 'll bring the things somewhere where it won't wake them all up, and if you 'll help churn, I 'll have the butter all lumped out before Sarell gets round in the morning. And I 've thought what a nice place that new corn-barn would be for my dairy. See?"

Lyman could n't see very much, of her face, for instance, literally; for the dusk had deepened; but he looked at her as if he *would* see what this new turn and aspect made of her. There was a neat, lively, decided little poise to her head and neck; he could discern that.

"I should n't wonder if you 'd put it through," he said, with his balanced slowness. "Do you know how many things you want for a dairy? It 's considerable of a move."

"I know. It 's real good of you, Lyme; there 'll be the churn, with the cream in it, and the pail of water, and the ice, and the wooden bowl and the butter-spats, and a table or a board or something, I suppose. Oh, and some salt, and a spoonful of sugar. But I 'll see to that. Yes; it is really good of you." She emulated his own slowness and tranquillity.

"Present, indicative, hey? well, perhaps I 'd as good go and make it so; or else it 'll have to be two o'clock in the room of three. How 'll you get up and out, without stirring anybody? Mother sleeps light toward mornin'."

"I 'm coming down by the roof and the maple-tree and the piazza-rail. Now, if you *ever* tell anybody!"

"*I* should n't let on," said Lyme gravely. "I 've got to creep down the long back roof from the attic, myself. If I should slip, would n't they think it was thunder!"

"Lyman, if you do slip, I 'll never forgive you!"

She got up at that and moved toward the house. It was quite time to show herself, at least, to Miss Ammah and the minister. She met Mr. Kingsworth coming up across the grass-plot. She gave him her hand.

"I 've been busy," she said. "There were things I had to do. And I 've been talking with Lyman; that was business

too. I meant to have come out; but you and Miss Ammah, I suppose, — "

"Were busy also," said the minister. "Yes. The evening is very lovely; would you mind a little turn up the hill here, now, while I tell you what we were talking of?" He had turned to walk down with her, but he paused a little as he spoke, and stood beside her in the clear moonlight that was brilliant now, nearing close upon the full.

"Had n't we better go back to Miss Ammah?" France asked, with an apprehension.

"I would like to say it to yourself," said Bernard Kingsworth.

"I don't think I had better walk any more now," said France. "I am a little tired."

"I ought to have remembered it! Of course you are doing too much!" And he came close to her with an offered arm. She could not help taking it, then; they walked up to the piazza-end.

Miss Ammah was nowhere to be seen. She had said good-night to the minister, and had gone upstairs. Mr. Kingsworth perceived that it was hardly a time to keep the girl. "May I come to-morrow?" he asked.

France was silent just long enough for silence to be conscious. "I would like to say it to yourself," and "may I come to-morrow?" were phrases and a position that she could not be silly enough to misunderstand. Yet she could assume nothing, even to refuse it. Poor France! It was her first time. It had come upon her all of a sudden. Just after all that thinking and comparison, too. Was this what they had been premonitory of? She felt hot and frightened. She wished she could run away to her mother.

"I suppose so. I beg your pardon. I do not know what to say," she said.

She stood at the upper of the two steps, in the deep shade of a maple-tree. Mr. Kingsworth had paused; he looked up at her from just below, as he waited on the grass-sward. He could not see her face quite plainly now; yet he looked up, and knew that she was looking down. He held his hat in his hand, and stood bareheaded before her while she answered him. Then, when those hesitating words came, he stepped quickly nearer.

"It is not fair that you should have to speak at all," he said. "I will come to-morrow; then, if you like, you can send me away."

Every word told the story, quite clearly, beforehand.

"Good-night." He held out his hand.

"Stop, Mr. Kingsworth! I must say something. It would be better for me to make a silly mistake than to let you make a — painful one. If this is — can possibly be — a question — between you and me — "

Of course, he could not let her force herself to anticipate him. Her words, too, began to tell the story, more instantly than he could bear, on her side. He must plead a little now.

"It is a question from me to you," he said. "The question of my life."

"Dear Mr. Kingsworth, don't think so! Don't ask it!"

"Don't answer it, Miss France, quite yet. Wait — let me wait. Ask yourself — "

France did it all. She waited; she let him wait; she asked herself. She did it in the breathing-time of half a dozen breaths; rather, it was done within her, or before her mental vision. It was all clear now. Why, — yes, all those whys that had been haunting her, conflicting with her true, high estimate of this man; as regarded him, all things suddenly took their certain place and relation. Her tenderest veneration of him returned; the little, ridiculous distastes vanished; he stood before her, asking what she was not worthy to bestow — what she had not in her to bestow. That was the perplexity, the hindrance, between them that must be put away.

One has seen a great landscape that one did not know was there suddenly declare itself in sharp delineation under a lightning flash in a space that had been void and black, whose range one could not even have calculated, an instant before. It was in such a way that all the possibilities of her life seemed instantly to take shape before France, in the showing of this vital question that was flashed upon them; and in them all she could not anywhere behold herself as belonging, in this wise, to Bernard Kingsworth. She did not belong to him. It was his mistake.

Into this momentary mirage she did not look to see what else might be. These phantasmas are but given for an instant to the searching and answering of a single demand. They meet that absolutely; then they close and vanish again, and we walk on in all other concernings as if we had not seen.

As France saw, she spoke; as if she had seen and pondered a long while, and the words had been all ready, and not an answer to a great surprise.

"I am so sure of my own mind, Mr. Kingsworth," she said slowly, too earnest to be shy; and then, perceiving, as suddenly as she had all the rest, how considered her assertion might appear, "Things come certain in a moment," she went on, still with the quietness of clear-seeing and truth-telling, and the strength of a wonderful forward move of her woman's life in her in those six breaths. "This does, that I could not have thought of, and that never happened to me before. I am not fit for it; it is a great deal more than ought to come to me; that is why I cannot take it."

Bernard Kingsworth mistook. "You can't expect me to be satisfied with that," he said. "I, who know myself, and who see you as you do not see yourself. You can't expect me even to consider such a word as that. It is I who ask, who want to take a great gift. I am not 'offering myself,'" he went on rapidly, with something of a light play on a phrase he quoted scornfully, "I am beseeching yourself — of you."

"I have not myself to give. I mean," she hurried, "that if I *could* give, I should know that it was given already; and I know that it is not. O Mr. Kingsworth! I am only a half-grown girl, and you are — I am ashamed! Don't think I don't know how far you are beyond me!"

"Only in this one thing," he said sadly, "that I cannot bring you beside me in. Let it all be. I may come another time, as I have come?"

France did not answer a word to that. What could she say? While she wondered, her time was gone. He would not press her silence; it was too nearly an answer in itself.

He put forth his hand to her again. She gave him hers, meeting his movement with a kindness that she could not help,

— that he could hardly, either, misunderstand. "Good-night," she said.

Compunction, gratitude, a great respect, were in her tone; a wistful clinging to a valued friendship, but not a whit of woman's love. Pained and embarrassed as she had been, her hand did not tremble; it gave itself frankly, heartily, but with a controlled reserve. His did not tremble either; but it clasped hers, and held it clasped an instant with a mute language. It was hard to let go, with that hand-clasp, all hold upon a possible hope; and yet France's fingers were so quietly, calmly withdrawing.

In that instant Israel Heybrook came out from the corner door in the house-angle upon the piazza behind, perceived the two figures standing there so, and retreated.

France heard. A quick half-turn of her head showed her who it was, just as he was gone again.

If he were not gone, there was no explaining.

Was there any explaining to Bernard Kingsworth of the start and thrill that changed her gentle withdrawing into a palpable recoil, and the release of the hand he held almost into something suddenly resentful?

There had hardly been need of greatly disconcerted shyness. She had but been saying in reality, as it might have seemed to anybody, the frankest, simplest good-night.

It was not shyness. It was a positive shock, in which her calm, careful kindness turned to some conscious dismay; a swift, absolute revulsion from the reality that had been between them.

It was the electric apprehension of but a point of time; it could hardly be recalled clearly to be judged of. Yet Bernard Kingsworth had to think over and over long after what it might have meant.

For France, there remained one single question. She scarcely knew how Mr. Kingsworth left her. The question was, What would Rael Heybrook think?

She had enough now to make her short night wakeful, beside her dairy plot and her three o'clock uprising.

And there was to be rather more in that also for her than she foresaw.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAY-DAWN IN THE DAIRY.

After an hour or two of restlessness, and struggle with up-leaping flashes of memory and suggestion that smote across her momentary quietings like candle-flames across closed eyes, the light came to France that composed her. How absurd she had been! Of course he would see, as the days went on. It could only be for to-night, to-morrow, that he would misunderstand. It would be quite plain to him, knowing what he must know, that it had ended as it had. Any otherwise, there would be more, of course — an open fact. He would see that it had stopped there where it had begun.

From twelve to three she slept tranquilly. The old clock in the dining-room roused her with its whirr before the hour. Almost in the three minutes' grace before the striking she was ready, — her hair tossed into a large net, her warm woollen wrapper on, with a fresh calico gabrielle buttoned and belted over it, her feet safely dressed and protected. She crept out over the shingles from the window close opposite the maple-tree. She let herself down like a kitten, with a soft, light drop from the lowermost branch to the ground, meeting it with a touch as if feet and earth were alike elastic. She ran to the clear little brook-pool among the elders just below the knoll, and made a delicious face and hand bath in the cold, bright water.

The air was trembling out of stillness with the first low-stirring notes of little birds. Away down in the woods, the ceaseless soft crush of the waterfalls kept up its gentle diapase.

The mystery of night was upon everything, tenderly and wonderfully; the greater, dearer mystery of day was being born again underneath the far eastern sky, — only a pale shadow of light, as it were, dividing itself from the moonlight that was still splendid

in the west; both together they made just a soft visibleness that would be growing, not waning, as the moon would be melting herself to a mist-shape of her own round shining.

France felt the rare, subtile, buoyant charm of the hour. Life itself took a new outset. Yesterday's old story was done with. "The world begins over again every day," she said.

Lyman met her, as she walked up over the dew-fresh turf, holding her skirts from the wetness of the grass, whose second growth was pushing well.

In the new corn-barn, with its wide-open door and its smell of clean pine, all was dry and comfortable and ready. Lyman had been churning. He helped her up the long step, and France sat down on the sill, her feet in the moonlight.

"I should like to sing," she said.

"Well, do," said Lyman.

"No, I 've got over it," she answered. There were two moods in her this morning, after all.

Perhaps she remembered that there were two different mornings that she knew of to-day, marked by the sun-tide that was rising over these Fellaiden hills. How many more, as separate and unconcordant, on the round earth as the same light swept over it she could not know, and the thought made her shiver suddenly.

"I 'll churn," she said. "I 'm cold — a little." Then she grew warm with her work, and the motive and ambition of it, and the morning turned lovely again.

"Why, it begins to *swish* already!" she cried, and stopped to open the square little trap in the churn, "Yes; there are crumbs of butter, truly, on the lid. It is n't much work. What shall we do with all our morning when it 's done?"

"Eat our breakfast, I guess. You 'll be hungry enough not to wait for Miss Ammah. Do you mean to get up like this every butter-day?"

"Not if they 'll let me have my own way when I do get up. Otherwise, they 'll know what to expect. There, if you 're rested, you may crank a little now."

"It *is* crank where you are," said Lyman, with his boy freedom.

"What does 'crank' mean, in that application of it?" asked France. "I don't carry my Webster in my pocket."

"Lively, chirk, chipper, chirp, chirruppy, cheery, jolly," he translated.

"Thank you. You 're a thesaurus."

"Sounds as if I was. What is it?"

"A treasury — everything, all you want, and all that belongs to it under the sun."

"That 's me, about as near as you could get to it. You 're smart. Takes common folks a sight of a while to find out smartness. This butter 's come; some people would have churned it all away again. Takes smartness to know where to stop. See here, clean an' good an' hard; no froth, no bust."

"Oh, what *is* 'bust'? Shall we ever get through our definitions?"

"Bust is when you scatter it; go at it *too* smart and fast, you know. Comes quick, and don't fairly come at all. Here you are!"

And the rich, clinging masses were out in the big wooden bowl.

"How sweet it smells! How pretty it is to do!" said France, working hard with her spaddle, and pressing out the buttermilk dew till it ran down in clear, thin streams.

"We must have some to drink," she said. "Where 's a cup, or something?"

Lyman had brought a tumbler. He filled it from the churn, and France drank it foaming. "What fun it is to live on a farm!" she said.

"Should you like it always?" asked the boy, as if by asking he could keep her.

She could answer the boy's asking. She did not even think how different it would have been if he were a man.

"I like it better than any living I ever had before," she said, impetuously. "Living is all covered up in the city, as the piece of the real world is that the city is built on. And then people have to go back to it in books and pictures and poetry, and theories and abstractions and sciences, instead of *things*.

What 's the reason the facts have to be all in one place, and the thoughts in another? *People* have to huddle so! It 's only creation that can take all the room it wants. You 're princes up here," she talked on, tossing her butter, with strong, cheerful spats for emphasis. "These are the parks and beautiful estates; the cities are crowds of alley-ways, and the suburbs are dooryards! Live here? Would I be a queen without the bother of it? Why, Rael—"

What elf of the air popped the wrong name between her lips, a name she never used ungarnished, as she chattered on? And what stopped her so absolutely at the sound of it? And what shadow came across the early daylight in the open doorway, just as she did stop?

Israel Heybrook stood there. Had he heard it?

He had heard her say "Would I be a queen?" in quick reply to her own emphatic "Live here?" whose very tone had already answered itself. He put it with what he had seen the night before; and he thought the little ardent speech was the brimming over of the girl's secret gladness in what she knew was to be. He heard his name, indeed; but how should he notice that? It was but the careless substitution of the one name for the other, both of which stood to her, indifferently, as those of the farmer's boys.

Well, had he ever dreamed of anything else? He knew he had by the throb that started in him when that home name, without the "Mr.," broke, in that happy accent, from her lips.

But Rael Heybrook could bear things. He was not a baby, to run away and cry. He had seen something, far off, and yet near enough to bless him,— and it is to be thought of, how, in two separate languages, "to wound" and "to beatify" have the same word to say them,— which would never, in the different man it might make of him, depart out of his life. His manhood had recognized womanhood: that is the blessing and the wounding, between the one and the other; it is the blow and the embrace with which the heavenly ennobles the earthly; it is the divine accolade.

Rael had waked and thought, some hours during that strange night; he had roused, in the early dimness, to a strange day,

different from all his other days; he had heard that thud of the churn, as he lay listening and thinking, near his window open into the still air. He had missed his brother from the opposite cot-bed in the large attic room; and he had remembered with prompt self-reproach the need there was to anticipate and lighten his mother's cares. "It 's just like Lyme," he said; and he hurried his own clothes on and came out to look for him, and see what on his own part he might do.

But to find France there, as his mother's daughter might have been, and to hear those words: it made him wonder, somehow, what the Lord meant by it. Why must this all come here to happen, right close to him, and drawing his soul into it?

And he stood there quietly and said, in his ordinary way, "So there are two of you? Miss France, I did n't know you were a dairy-woman."

"O Mr. Rael!" She had what they call a woman's wile after all. She caught up her self-possession in an instant, and spoke with a pretty, hypocritical surprise. "No; I have just found it out myself. And I think to be a dairy-woman, in a morning like this, is to be an Eve in Paradise. Why did n't you ever tell me of the mornings?"

"I thought you had seen them pretty often for yourself."

"Yes; at six o'clock. But the morning is all over then." She laid her last smooth roll of butter into the bowl, spread the clean, wet cloth upon it, dropped the spats on the table, and came to the door.

"Look at those clouds, all pink and flame color! They were purple a little while ago, with bands of primrose sky between. Now, there is a great fire there; see how deep it looks, as if half the east had melted and dropped in. That 's where the phœnix story comes from, I know. See how the sun shoots up real, blazing wings! He 's coming, coming! O, look, look! He just *leaps* up, out of that hollow in the hills. And nothing can put him back again, one single second! This day 's begun, and it has *got* to be!"

Perhaps France rushed with more abandon into her dawn-poetry, that she felt, on this first meeting with Rael Heybrook, after last night, she must rush into something.

Then Rael blundered. When one tries to cover a consciousness with a commonplace, or to hide an underthought with a surface one, the thing underneath crops up through the slightest word like a murder stain. "I don't wonder you 're happy, Miss France," he said. "I mean, for this good work you 've done for my mother."

It was not screening, so much as substitution of one real feeling for another; that made it worse, the feeling was so evident. Also, those two treacherous little syllables, "I mean," how they betrayed him with their explanation and apology!

The dawn was red on both their faces. The sun had leaped forth upon them with a vengeance.

France only said, with her morning glee all dampened down, "It was pleasant work to do, and pleasant to try to help her. I must go in now."

Lyman was putting the things together; he was going to carry butter-bowl and churn into the house. Rael, standing outside, had to give his hand to France and help her down from the high door-sill.

Then she walked away to the piazza, where the door stood open by which Rael had come out; and Rael went round to the kitchen stoop to get his milk-pails. The cows would be down the lane early to-day.

The day was begun, and it had got to be. Not a second of it could be put back. But it was one of the days that seem like a hard wedge in life, separating other days.

CHAPTER XXV.

IT MUST TAKE CARE OF ITSELF.

SARELL came home; she was in the kitchen when Israel carried in the milk-pails. In a little red farmhouse of three rooms, half a mile away along the green, rocky hill-flank, a wonderful joy had begun, and this was a day of genesis, a day of Eden. Yet it was the selfsame day that shone slowly, hardly, in its splendor, over the heads of these three, to whom its sun, as it tracked its swerveless course, measured spaces like the spaces of eternity. For these three had each seen into their own lives, into the asking and answering of them; had caught, had believed they caught, a quick, blinding revelation at once of what might be and what must be. And the two were whole firmaments apart.

It was a sober day in the dwelling, because the good woman of the house, the good neighbor of the widely-scattered countryside, was "too tired" to come out of her room. "Lazy," she called herself; and never even asked who churned and worked up the butter. She dozed and dozed, and did n't care about any food, and just stayed still as she lay; as Miss Ammah had done the day the fever began with her. She would not have the doctor; she persisted that she was not ill, only given out in her strength; and, indeed, there was no access of heat and fever; she was simply pale and prostrate. They tended her as well as she would permit them, and kindly let her be still. It was mother's way, Rael said; he had seen her so before. He did not think it was the fever. She had never had a fever in her life.

In the afternoon Israel drove down to the lower village for the usual mail. Farmer Heybrook and Lyman were away in the upper wood-lot, cutting their basswood timber. Rael came

home with the letters; one of them was for France, directed in the tall, strong lettering of Mr. Kingsworth's handwriting. France colored scarlet when she took it from his hand. They all knew that handwriting so well.

She had not expected this, at any rate. But how explain that she did not, that there was nothing to explain; how explain about her blushing, when nobody questioned, nobody noticed, apparently? Israel Heybrook, with his grave, quiet face, was just the same as always when he gave it to her; and having delivered it, turned round and walked away, What was there for him to ask, or for her to say?

What did the minister mean by it? She was angry with the man for sending her this letter in the face of all the household, to whom she could account for nothing. She was angry with herself for caring so. She was provoked, most of all, that she had taken it, and stood there, conscious and coloring. Why had n't she the presence of mind to lay it down on the table and leave it lying there, that he might see it was nothing to her; that anybody might know she had the note; that it might be about a book, or any common thing; that any time would do to read it? But no; her evil genius had held her hands and her breath and sent that sudden, wretched pulse of hot blood all over her to tell tales, lying tales! She had been helpless under it; then she had run up stairs rapidly, as soon as Rael had turned his back, but had not passed out of hearing; up stairs to her own room, where she flung the letter across the bed and it fell to the floor behind it, and she herself went across to the farther roof-window, with a step that almost stamped, dropped down on her knees before the low sill, put her elbows on it and her cheeks in her two hands, and looked with fixed, furious eyes straight away into the farthest line of pale-blue, misty hills.

It was a horrid day. What had the sun come up for at all, that morning she had thought so beautiful?

Miss Ammah was down in Mrs. Heybrook's room with her knitting-work; there was that one scrap of comfort, — that she could behave as she pleased alone up here this hour, and provoke no question. Question? Why *did n't* Miss Ammah at

least ask something? She knew what the minister meant to ask, France supposed. Yet what good would that do, even? She could not ask it out before them all.

Would he keep coming, and writing, and not taking a "No" for an answer? She forgot all about his beautiful sermons, and his kindly, helpful talk, and the worth and dignity that were, she had known in her cool moments, so far above her own. She forgot to be thankful or pitiful. He had made her blush about him, he had made people think things: she could not forgive him.

Down on the floor was that letter; she remembered it after a while, and that she would have to open and read it, simply to know what to do next. To think of having to go abjectly after it, stooping, groping where she had flung it off! That is the meanest thing about a high passion-flight; you have to come down out of it, and pick up or smooth out, perhaps carefully and painfully restore, something you have maltreated, crushed, or tossed away. Well if it be nothing more precious or sentient than a bit of written paper!

We will not look while she goes down after it; while she finds and opens and reads it. She must have done it; but we will not curiously intrude.

Bernard Kingsworth only wrote that he was going a day or two earlier than he had intended, to a ministerial exchange with a friend, pastor of his old Massachusetts parish, who needed the mountains for awhile. That it had been planned in the spring, long ago. He had called last night because of it; because he must go soon. He would not see them again for several weeks. Perhaps, when he returned in September, they would be gone.

He had spoken because the time was short. That was what the note meant, without saying. If he had been listened to as he had hoped, there would have been a few days, perhaps a week, of happy interval. Perhaps other arrangements could have been made then, for this time, or some of it, that now he must spend away from Fellaiden. All this was clear in inference; but he did not say it. He only said, "Good-by" and "God bless her."

She felt the generosity of it; she was ashamed of her petu-

lance, her wrathfulness. She had insulted this man, so grandly her superior, though he would never know it. She felt as if she had flung his forbearing note in his face.

None the less she remembered how things would seem, all that long time. Nobody to contradict, nothing to show the mistake of, what people might have with reason guessed. That no other letter would come even, they might not know. There were three of them to fetch the mails, as might happen, besides the morning fetching of the butcher or a neighbor coming back from the mill, and a letter from the same hand might not arrive by the same hand twice in a long time. He — she could not, in common sense, keep up "people" and plurals to herself all through her argument — he never would ask any other messenger what letters had come! He, Israel Heybrook, who had seen the parting, and had brought back this, would go on thinking what he had thought. Well? She only hated to have people under misapprehensions. She never could play a joke for that very reason. She could not for one minute like to see anybody acting or feeling in a mistake.

She was behaving like a goose in a story-book! Why could n't the simpletons speak out, and set things straight? That was what she asked always over those provoking fictitious complications. Why not walk up to Israel Heybroook now, the next time she came in his way, and say coolly, "You inferred something, I think, the other evening,— and since,— that was not true. I would rather you should know it is not"?

Because, what could she suppose Israel Heybrook cared whether it were true or not? And how could she let him, nay, how could she let herself know that it was anything to her what he might imagine about it?

There was another way. She could drop the note, half unfolded as it lay now, upon her wool-basket. She could hand it to Miss Ammah out on the piazza there, when Rael might be by. She could say, "I have had this note from Mr. Kingsworth. He is going away for awhile. I suppose we shall hardly see him any more."

All very well, if it had only waited to occur to her at the proper time, and so been genuine. She would not plan it beforehand, be ungenuine for all Rael Heybrook's —

What?

It *could n't* have occurred to her. She saw that, also. There would have been an infinitesimal space of time between the suggestion and the act, which would have had just the conscious purpose in it that all night and all day could have now, if with this forethought she waited for her opportunity till to-morrow afternoon.

"It must take care of itself," she said, and went down stairs and set the tea-table.

She took that upon her then and there. She was ready afterward in the kitchen, with the clean towels to which she had found her way, to wipe the dishes as Sarell washed. Then she said, "I made the bread last night: it was good. Let me make it, please, every night, till Mrs. Heybrook gets rested again. You have enough to do, and I like it."

"You 're a queer kind of a boarder," Sarell answered, looking at her sharply with the blue twinkle of her shrewd eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"NOT HALF GOOD ENOUGH."

Mrs. Heybrook did not get rested, neither did she grow more ill, for several weeks. It was a low, hidden, prolonged ailing; rather the absence of asserted sickness than sickness itself, which might have run its course and turned to convalescence quicker. But "all that ever ailed her was a slow tire," Mrs. Heybrook said. "She had n't the force left to be real sick with." So they ministered to her, as only prostration would have persuaded her to let them minister, and waited for the force to come.

"That girl ain't half a fool," Sarell said of France, one day.

"Miss Everidge!" said Israel Heybrook, with unmistakable quick emphasis.

"Oh, yer need n't put no blastin' powder under yer words. I ain't disrespectin' her, not an atom. I 'd blow up fer her as fast as anybody, now, though I did n't think sech gret things of her when she fust come, steppin' round in her cambrics. But I tell you what it is, she shines out now! It 's the *sense* of it! She don't come ketchin' holder things she don' know how; nor stan' roun' starin', sayin', 'Can't I do this, and can't I do that,' when ye 'r up to yer eyes, an' want all yer elber-room, an' she knows she can't. She jest picks up a corner she *can* heft, an' she don't leggo on 't. If it 's done once, it 's done every day. You c'n depend on it, an' that 's where the help comes in. You c'n count up the rest o' y'r time clear. She 's got one thing after another ont' her end, till I tell *you* the teter 's balanced pooty neah'n the middle!"

Miss Tredgold turned things over in her mind.

She did not ask France Everidge questions, just to draw forth in words what she could infer perfectly well without words.

She was not a woman to whom life was only life when the facts of it troubled the atmosphere.

France did not tell her anything. The open note was not handed over to her, as conveying any tidings of Mr. Kingsworth's movements. He was Miss Ammah's friend, and had spent that whole evening with her, first. Among other things, so France phrased it, he had himself, probably, mentioned to her his impending absence. Why should France parade the circumstance of his having written to her also? That, unfortunately, had paraded itself quite as much as she could placidly endure.

So silence told a story, and the birds of the air, that are unspoken swift perceptions, flew between them. Miss Ammah knew that the young girl had refused to listen to the minister.

Miss Ammah knew, too, that Rael Heybrook was still "giving way." It was hard to tell from the grave, controlled demeanor of this youth, who had known nothing of the passion and excitement of life, nothing of the stage-and-novel demonstrations of human experience — to whom a feeling was something covered up in his own soul, and decorous bearing was like the quiet strength of his own great hills — what lay beneath his restraint, or whether his calm comings and goings were restraint at all.

Had he given over, without fully taking to his consciousness, that which France Everidge's presence had quickened him to feel a need of? or was there begun with him the long, deliberate foregoing of a lifetime that must be always aware of what it might — nay, ought to have had, but which should be owing till eternity should justify all debts of being and relation?

Was not *this* owing to him, at least, and perhaps from her, that he should know his own conditions fairly, so that his word, his act, might shape and play fairly in them? This was the ought — the *owing* — that she turned over carefully and anxiously in her mind.

But Miss Ammah was not one of those over-helpful subordinates that must always be giving Providence a lift. She thought, on general principles, that the straws she could see in the way might very possibly be small obstacles before the purpose that was marching on. It would be a foolhardy officiousness to

try to pick a pin from the track before the wheels of a locomotive.

She believed in the need of things that happen, for the most part; except they happen by craft of selfish intermeddling, or open-eyed wrongdoing. If there were a living truth between these two, that belonged to the eternities, it should have a force in itself that would find or break its way as it grew. She might as well interfere to guide one of these mountain brooks to the sea, as to cut a channel for a true human love, born in high places, and bound with an enlarging might toward the infinite deeps.

For such a love as this, between natures that were not coarse or common, must be born in the high places if born at all. It would prove itself by the overbearing that it would need to carry it past hindrance, delay, difference. If it were not this love, and did not prove itself so, then let it not be. It would have proved itself but that other poor thing instead, — a passing fancy, on the one part; on the other, as she had reasoned before, a mere foreshowing of some waiting reality.

All this did not prevent Miss Ammah's ponderings gravitating much toward the subject. Where the body is, thither will the thought-wings flutter and swoop. And of the thoughts of the heart the mouth speaks, though the intent of the will may drive speech by very roundabout turns.

Had France absolutely and finally refused the minister? That was what she would very much have liked to know. Not the bald fact; she hated curiosity, and things she had no real business with. But what mind France was in toward Bernard Kingsworth, what sort of place and estimate she held him in, what she would say of him, friendly-wise, or whether she would say anything of him at all, — these questions, the answer to which would point like a weather-vane to the quarter out of which the wind was blowing — moved Miss Ammah. The more, of course, that she remembered Mr. Everidge and the anxiety, which was a part of her own uneasy responsibility, with which he must be awaiting results.

They moved her to say something one day when her morning letters had come in, and among them was one from Northampton;

to say it just as she would have done had there been no thought behind to make her scrupulous. She would never have deliberated, any more than France herself, pretext or opportunity; but she suddenly resolved that she had at least a right to act naturally.

"This is from Mr. Kingsworth," she said; and she just flashed her eyes over her glasses at France, without raising her head.

France did not raise her head, either. She was very busy with a dark-blue ribbon and some French marigolds that she was putting upon Sarell's Sunday hat for a fine autumn trimming.

But she was not so silly as not to speak at all. She settled a critical pin, and then she did look up, with quite a charming, innocent openness.

"Mr. Kingsworth? Is he coming home pretty soon?"

"No; he is to give Mr. Dillon a fortnight longer. I thought you knew that. It was spoken of last Sunday."

"I believe it was. Miss Ammah, don't you think Mrs. Heybrook ought to have some chicken jelly for her dinner?"

"And then Mr. Kingsworth thinks of going for a week, a minister's week, one more Sunday and a fortnight of weekdays, to Schenectady, and up round then, by Montreal. Yes; Mrs. Heybrook must have the chicken jelly; I left some covered in a saucer on the cellarway shelf," answered the categorical woman.

Her categoricalness thwarted herself; she could no longer avail herself of the simple, natural thing that she had a right to, and had begun with. She had to insist on her own subject, now; and having made up her mind, she did insist.

"I don't think you are as much interested in Mr. Kingsworth as you were, France," she said boldly. "You have scarcely asked a word about him, all the while. Or *were* you interested? Perhaps I thought you must like him because I did. He has certainly been very kind; and he is not a common man."

Now France turned categorical.

"I do like him," she said with a directness that seemed to challenge Miss Ammah's inquisition. "But I can live without him. Not common, no. He 's too far out of the common. He is a man you want an interval between. I could n't keep up

with him every day. In fact, Miss Ammah, I 've always known, and I know it more and more, that I 'm nothing but a between. I have a great reverence for teachers and preachers; but I prefer to consort — with the 'taught and the praught.'"

And then France laid her finger on her lip, holding a smile there, while her eyes fixed themselves with a sudden, intense deliberation.

Miss Ammah was answered, and knew that the minister was.

France turned to her, with her finger on her lip, and a mute, funny, beseeching face.

"I 've half a mind not to ask you a question all day," said Miss Ammah petulantly, "and keep you there, with your rhymes and your wishes! What *have* you wished for, I wonder, when you *don't* want —"

"Thank you! Thank you!" cried France exultingly. "I 've wished, yes, I 've wished for just *common* sense, — I don't say altogether for myself. What a nice world this would be, if we could only, most of us, have that, and know when it 's all we 've got, and be contented with it, and stay where we belong! but everybody now must be so fine and superior, somehow, if not in themselves, then by some sort of annexation. There is n't any comfortable multitude *left* to sit down upon the grass. I don't mean, if I can possibly help it, to desert the multitude."

"You can't. You can only desert your place in it, if you make a mistake. The multitude is all round the planet." Miss Ammah rehearsed her favorite sentiment, in which she retained copyright, notwithstanding pulpit elucidation; but her nose was not horizontal, this time. It inclined itself with a gentle thoughtfulness. It directed its line, not across France Everidge's head, but downward, in the parallel of a glance that fell, almost tenderly, upon France's face, as the girl sat on the low piazza step, with her work-basket on the floor above her. There is a great deal in the coincidence, or otherwise, of this line of the nose with the line of vision.

"Yes 'm," said France, not looking up, but prinking with her finger-tips the set of her marigolds and blue bows. "And it 's a lovely old planet, too! and I like things to keep, generally, pretty close to it, for common living. I don't mind an occa-

sional sweep upward, — of a rainbow, for instance; but I 'm thankful the rainbow is an arch, and not a column. The nicest of it is where it touches the ground. That 's the way it is here, among these hills. It starts, and drops, right out of the grass and trees, and into them again."

France chattered on, half in earnest, half at random, wholly bent upon escaping the personal point of the subject; settling her ribbons as she talked.

"Would you like to start and drop that way? Could you live among the grass and trees all your life?"

"How should it ever be possible to me, Miss Ammah? I *didn't* start that way."

"Well, drop then!" said Miss Ammah, provoked at the girl's coolness.

"You can't drop *up*," answered France. "Does n't this look nice? Now, the next thing is Mrs. Heybrook's best cashmere skirt, that she 's worrying about. I 'm going to put a silk dado to it."

"France," said Miss Ammah, after two minutes' checkmated pause, "you will have to write to your father. He knows, and he 'll be dreading and expecting. He told me he hoped you would belong to him for a dozen years to come." In this little impromptu verbatim report, Miss Ammah neatly, and perhaps, preveniently, discharged her conscience of a bit of matronly duty.

The hat and ribbons and the busy fingers lay suddenly still on the girl's lap. The mischief — that was only a cover, at best, to maidenly constraint, and a feeling that she did not choose to let come uppermost — died out of her eyes, and a different glisten showed there; she was silent for a minute, herself; then she said, quite simply and gently, "Don't think me a fool or a good-for-nothing. You are all a thousand times too good to me. I 'll write to papa."

And presently she gathered up all her little millinery and went away.

The result was the reception by Mr. Everidge, two days after, of this characteristic note, in which most was to be read in the blanks between the paragraphs: —

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.

"DEAR PAPA, — I was n't half good enough for the minister. Miss Ammah thought you would be glad to know.

"I think I shall belong to you for a dozen years to come.

"Seeing that this sending is nearly as much Miss Ammah's as mine,

"I am yours affectionately,

"FRANCES EVERIDGE AND COMPANY."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"OLD THUNDER."

The shallow, rambling brook that ran down behind the north mowing, broadened out in the hollow at the foot of the great field, took a spread and a turn around a group of huge boulder rocks, fern-draperied, and pine-crowned with a miniature forest of their own, and left this pretty island separated by but half a dozen strides of distance from the mainland on either side. Beyond was open pasture, that reached back to the farm boundary on that part, and was met by the rougher "wood-pasture" of the Clark Farm. Clark's fences were always half-down, his land was stumpy and scrubby; but it looked wild and pretty over there, across the fair, open lot, where Mrs. Heybrook's flocks of turkeys ranged, and the sun lit up the swells and sweeps of the short, gold-ripe grass.

The boys had flung a rude bridge from the field border to the island, over the water that was too deep here for stepping-stones. It flowed around the rocky little islet in a deep pool, where a cliff or basin in the underlying ledge seemed to fill itself before it let the stream pass on over the lower lip. High among the heaped-up granite masses was a shady, cup-like chamber, half grotto, half bower, carpeted and cushioned with mosses and pine needles.

The Sunday afternoon after her talk with Miss Ammah repeated to the reader in the last chapter, while Sarell and her new hat had gone off for a holiday, when the old farmer was dozing in the keeping-room rocking-chair close beside his wife's bedroom door, and Israel sat reading by his mother's window, while she too, slept, and Miss Ammah up stairs was enjoying her one weekly daytime nap, France, finding herself alone, betook herself, with her book, down the mowing.

She made a pretty moving spot of color as her white skirt swept the little knobbed heads of the low grasses, and her scarlet cardinal cape contrasted brightly with her dress and the dark green of the bushes scattered along the waterside, and of the pine thicket toward which she walked. She had broken one bright bough from the undermost great branch of a maple-tree, and was using it for a shade against the westing sun, and the leaves made a responding glow and flutter to those of the long hood-ribbons of her cloak that the west wind blew behind her.

A pretty picture of color thrown out more and more against the shadow and the green of the copse as she went ; but there was no living creature, this side, to see her so. She wandered slowly down, alone in all that outstretch of billowy green hillside, the house sleepy and quiet, with shut blinds, behind her.

A living creature from far away upon that other side, however, saw her ; saw the brilliant fluttering of her scarlet cloak and its long ribbons, and the waving of the bough, like a red and golden flame in the fiery sunlight, — a great, fearsome creature, with sullen eyes that set themselves with a steady, threatening glare toward her from under a square, shaggy forehead and short, sharp, cruel horns, — Farmer Clark's cross bull, with the ring in his nose, that was almost always kept chained in the barn, or only let out in the far cliff meadow beyond and below the steep forest pasture.

Around the cliff, up through the woodland, and now over the broken fence to the further slope of the Heybrook lot he had strayed, sniffing and booing in his restless, half-excited fashion, till, from across that long distance, he caught a glimpse of the bright moving figure, and watched it with that sullen menace to see if it did move, — if it were a living thing to spend a fury on. Then he shook his shaggy head and cruel horns with quick, sharp tosses, snorted, puffed, and sped on with lowered front down the pasture-side. Every now and again that half roar trembled on the air like a broken mutter of thunder, — thunder with a voice in it.

But France did not see or hear to apprehend. She was timid enough of cows if she had to meet them close, but she had become used, here, to the far-off sounds of cattle, and she did not dis-

tinguish this to divine the difference. She was looking down among the little strawberry-vines, whose early-turning leaves showed here and there half-buried gleams, like the gleams of summer fruit; at the clouds of springing grasshoppers that were leaping up into the warmth as if they were the embodied gladness of the live earth under the long sweetness; at the brown-winged, gold-flecked butterflies that stayed so late in their pretty autumn dress; at the empty nests here and there, out of which she had watched the ground-sparrows' broods hatching in the earlier time; and she was thinking of all that earlier time, growing late and short now, and leaving or gathering in its lateness and briefness so much that she had never enjoyed or thought of before, — so much of a world that she had never been born into before; that she was only a baby three months old in now.

And while she walked and pondered, the great, shaggy shape was coming on obliquely from behind her, slanting his line as she lengthened hers. As he descended through the cradle-dip of the undulating field he ceased his half roars, losing sight of the exasperating object, but when his heavy head and horns and terrible eyes reared themselves over the hither swell of land and he caught view of it again, he gave forth a real, angry bellow and plunged on faster, faster toward where his path should strike on hers, with only the narrow stream between them, so shallow here in its upper course, so undefended often at frequent intervals by the kindly tangles of its broken hedgery.

Nobody can mistake that sound of a bull's roar. France gave a shuddering start and looked fearfully about her. But all this peaceful field was wide and safe; some elder-bushes fringed the water by her side, and through them she could not instantly discern the whereabouts of that which well enough kept trace of hers, never losing from its relentless gaze the sunlit scarlet of her dress as it went gleaming on behind the green. There came another roar, and the sound shook all the air about her. A dreadful trampling and bounding, and it felt close upon her.

Electrified in every nerve, she sprang, she hardly knew whither or from what; she was in the midst of some half-comprehended horror which enveloped her, helpless. The great

space around her was all one inescapable danger. The air wrapped her with a threat like a fire.

But her spring brought her forward to where the alders lessened and sloped down to one of the broken, gullied spaces, and the threat, the peril, defined itself.

Across the little brook, with nothing between her and it but the rough channel-hollow, the rippling water, and the ridges of loose, water-washed stones that made low natural walls along the sides, she saw — with horns now angrily tossing, now with head plunged downward to tear the ground, tail flung out rigid with fury, eyes glaring, hot, snorting breath panting toward her, making short sidewise bounds along the division line of bank and bush and stone and flowing current — the fierce, enormous beast whose like she had never seen before, but which she knew now face to face as if she had known him, and this that was coming to happen, all the days of her life.

The hot fright turned cold with a gathering back of vital force to heart and brain as she faced and realized the thing. It was not courage that came to her so much as a singular trance-like concentration upon the instant's situation and necessity. Everything else of life and consciousness, instead of flashing up in wonderful intrusive review such as she had been told and had read of, blotted itself out. There was but this one moment, this one fact, of all ever or anywhere.

She and this monster, and the question between them. Every breath of its and hers was a nameless period of time. Every step was a stage in a prolonged, intense experience. For neither she nor it stopped wholly short; some delivering instinct helping her to act on what had not time to shape itself into a definite perception and to know in her very body, without waiting for it to come through her mind, that the creature was *tracking* her along that boundary whose mere appearance would be nothing to its power if an absolute pause invited him to make a rush across it, or if it entered his brute head that he might cross it and pursue her.

The gulch was rough and deep just here; the lines of marginal stones were the suggestion of a barrier, scarce more. Presently the short growth thickened itself, and grew tall

again. Behind that, she would be as behind a fence; but beyond again, she knew very well there was a different opening and a smoother outspread, a place where a cat might almost run across.

She dared not stop: to go back would be to pass the creature, to say nothing of more exposed points still and the longer distance and up-hill, — the beast, with his glare and his tossing horns and his horrible tread and his hot roar, always following her.

She walked on fast, therefore, with limbs that felt tense with the strain that conquers trembling. She kept the parallel line: if she had run *from* the brook, the bull would have dashed after her. He kept over against her, with his short, angry leaps, his sniffs, his snorts, his growlings. She gained the bosky covert, over whose tops she could still see the glaring eyes, the tossing horns. She held her look, through the very trance of dread, steadfastly on the awful look that met her, and still moved on to keep him moving.

When the protecting hedge stretched only its last few yards between them, she turned square toward it and stood still.

The bull squared himself also, and stood still, in his fashion, pawing and snorting.

She half turned backward on her steps, and he turned. Then, instantly, like a flash, she wheeled; and before he could comprehend, or follow the quick movement with his ponderous bulk, she gleamed in her scarlet drapery across the break, down the swift pitch that the brook made into the glen-hollow, and gained the shelter of the thick button-bushes below, all overrun with vines of bittersweet springing among the first great outcrops of the ledge to which the face of the hill bared itself. Here, besides, the water-channel made a quick bend toward the pasture.

She snatched her cloak from her shoulders, bursting it from its fastening at the throat, and flung it high across the bushes; then ran, as she had never run before, along her right-angled path, while the brute made his headlong, furious bolt at the point she left behind her.

A moment more, and the deep water was between her and

the unreasoning creature, who would not go back to where he might have followed her, but came plunging on behind the broadening thicket and the spreading stream.

Over the bridge, and up the rude rock-niches, and into the safe, pine-shaded grotto. There she dropped full length, not fainting, — France was one of those who could not faint, — but powerless in every muscle, deadly weak and trembling in every nerve and fibre; breathless, almost pulseless; grasped at last by that which had not grasped her.

Rael sat reading — not his book, not the hillside that sloped up restfully toward the sky, as he looked forth at it from his mother's east window, written all over as it was with the word of the grass and the late little golden stars of the dandelion and the shadow of the light-moving clouds above it westward, and the soft scamper of the gentle whiffs of wind across it.

He was reading neither this nor that.

He too was thinking of that brief time, the early and the late summer, which had been to him a lifetime that he had never lived before.

Bernard Kingsworth had stayed away, overstaying his engagement. He would not have done that, if there had been any engagement here. That question had answered itself, as questions do when you wait to let them. What then? Was there any question at all for him? Only this, and it was not a question. France Everidge was all of womanhood to him, and would be, whether out of all womanhood God could make a wife for him or not. That asking lay unsolved in the affirmation of the whole.

Would he tell her this before she went away? Would he dare tell her?

Not that he thought now of the little differences, and was afraid of them. Somehow they had all vanished before that nobler fear that, like the fear of the Lord, is the beginning of highest, most beautiful knowledge, that changes from fear to lovely reverence without fear, only when the perfect, answered love comes and replaces it. He knew the difficulties, the impossibilities, or he would have known if it had been direct

question of them; but he had no fear, no doubt of outside judgment from France Everidge herself.

Should he tell her, — give her all the truth to go away with, let it be what it might to her, — or should he let her go away without it, — let their lives, that were these three months old together, detach themselves from each other, part separate ways, and get different and divided from each other more and more?

Should n't he at least thank her once for what she had been to him this summer-time? He thought he would at least do that.

He could not ask her anything. How could he, till he had something more to give? Himself? Yes, he could give that; but himself was not all he must be when he should ask, if ever he could, France Everidge to take him.

Upon his thoughts broke suddenly that outward sound, crashing the summer Sunday stillness.

Lyman, lounging in the kitchen-porch, with Bowse at his feet, spoke across through the open door and window ways. "Old Thunder has got up into the Clark pasture," he said.

Bowse, a cattle-dog, knowing every horned head within three miles, and a perfect beadle among the herds, — flying in among them if any were out of bounds, and separating the mixed companies, turning each farmer's own toward its own belonging, — lifted up his head, sniffed and snorted much, in his way, as Old Thunder sniffed and snorted in a bigger; both battle-fashion, both *qui-vive* to the scarlet from afar off.

Lyman laid his hand on the dog's collar. "Don't get oxcited, Bowse! 't ain't *your* Thunder. No need to run after what you can't tackle with when you ketch up."

"That sounds nearer than Clark's woods," said Israel. "He 's over in our piece, and he 's after something."

"Gobblers," said Lyme carelessly. "Can't gobble them."

Rael went to the north window and looked out. Old Thunder was down in the cradle-dip, now, sniffing and muttering to himself as he went along. Rael saw nothing.

The next was that frightful roar from just below upon the hill. Bowse bounded up with a big bark.

Israel strode into the keeping-room and out upon the west piazza, then back in a single instant, with a white face.

"Where 's Miss Everidge?" he demanded, with a question like a pistol-shot.

"Up stairs," said Lyman, with his usual coolness. "Hold on, Bowse! We 'll see, old boy." And with his fingers in Bowse's collar he went out at the end door.

Israel leaped to the foot of the stairs. "Miss Everidge!" he called.

Miss Ammah answered sleepily, as if raising herself up and looking round her as she spoke, "She is n't here. She went out, I guess. She came and got her hat and cape."

That red cape! Rael knew all now.

Lyman and Bowse had disappeared.

Rael ran, hatless, down the mowing.

The drop of the land hid everything. It was below there that something, he did not let himself think what, was happening. The bull was trampling and tearing, bellowing hideously. Rael heard the bushes crashing.

Suddenly something went up, dark, into the air,— dark, with a scarlet flutter about it. It was gone down in an instant. It did not look like — did it? He could not recall in that next horrible second how it had seemed. Dear Lord in heaven! what *should* it look like? Rael, in an whirlwind of agony, that was lasting ages, shot down the hill.

He never could tell, after that, in what order his sensations came to him. The glimpse across the break in the brook-shrubbery, of the bull, head down, trampling and tearing; a heap upon the ground; a scarlet glimmer through the cloud of dust and clods that flew at every plunge; the horrible, heavy snarl of hungry rage; the barks of the dog, rushing with his small fury at the heels of the huger; his own mad cry, that went forth from him above it all, and that he heard before he knew that he was uttering it,— a great imprecation, the only word he ever spoke like that, and yet that was not blasphemy, but a fiery, challenging appeal from all that was human in him to all that was human in Almighty God, against all beastly, fiendish savagery and helpless sacrifice upon the earth; the

partial lull of the tumult, as Bowse, fresh and eager, drew off the bull by bounds and barks to a new pursuit, and then dashed away before him over the steep upland; the uprising of that white figure in the high, rocky shelter; the out-flinging of her arms toward him; her sharp, clear cry, "Rael! Rael! I'm safe!"

Lyman, coming down after the dog, across the brook and upon the pasture side, had seen sooner and more clearly that a torn-up mass of hedge and clinging earth, with the red cloak, however it had come there, was all the beast had got to satisfy his frenzy on; that he was half tired already; that Bowse would keep him in tow, and cunningly head him on toward his proper quarters; that his own shortest course was to keep on, cross lots, to the Clark farmhouse and send out the men: and presently all the brookside and the field were nearly still again, only Bowse's receding barks and the snortings of old Thunder sounding farther and farther toward the forest-line.

Rael came up into the grotto chamber.

The strong fellow's limbs all trembled, even as the girl's had done. He looked at France an instant, with eyes that showed his soul through; then he grasped a shelf of rock with both hands, and leaned his face down upon them.

France came to his side. Something like a dry sob shook the shoulders, whose manly strength would have been but as a reed to save her from that awful danger.

She laid her hand upon him. "Rael! Rael!" she said. "What is it? Did you think —"

Rael lifted up his face, turned himself, brought his hands round from their hold upon the rock, and took her hand in them as it slid down from his shoulder.

"I think I could not live if you had been hurt," he said. "The very hairs of your head are precious — and I could not help you!"

Her hand was in his; his voice was deep and trembling; from his eyes came forth the intensity of the feeling that even now he restrained in speech. He did not say "to me," when that utterance had broken from him, taking the very form that

God's love, spoken to man, has made holy. "Precious?" Yes; to all who had ever known her, bright and pure and sweet and strong as she was, a flower of lovely and noble girlhood. There was no word for her to answer; yet his whole soul had laid itself down before her: he "could not live if she had been hurt."

His doubt had determined itself; in the thrill of the circumstance that had befallen, he had shown her his heart, with herself in it. Yet she was in other hearts also. He asked her for nothing back. He had said all he had any right to say; he was too worldly-simple to think he could not say that truth of truths, and say no more. And in the face of death and blessed escape, he had said it, and left it where it was.

France had turned deadly pale; she had put her other hand out against the rock, to steady herself. He had told her heaven's truth, if he had left nothing to be answered. What was heaven's truth in her own heart? For one instant only, that demand, which she was not ready for, rushed upon her.

That and the impossibilities in her and about her smote together, and it was as if her heart were between them.

Must she face it now, that truth, whatever it was that she so shrunk from, and honestly let him know? Would it answer in spite of her, as it had spoken from him, who had asked nothing? And then, what would she have done, and what would, what could come of it? There was hardly anything distinct in her; she only felt the two terrible forces that these questions would have represented, had they taken shape of words.

She made a desperate effort against the faintness that seemed coming back again. She would not sink, nor sit; she stood up straight, and the red rushed up to her cheeks and lips, as she wrestled herself from that helplessness, her sharp self-command her only restorative. Then tears came to her eyes.

"I am not fit to thank you, dear Mr. Rael," she said; and it was all she could say.

The moment was over in which she could have given back as he gave her.

But she had given him that one warm syllable that any friend might give. She was kind; she was not offended; the

woman-angel in her made her tender, dealing with his boldness. That was how it seemed to Rael.

He did not let go the hand he held; but he only drew it through his arm, for help. "You must let me help you," he said; and then she moved to go down with him from the rock. "They will be frightened at the house," said she.

So they descended the broken pathway, and crossed the stepping-stones. He went before her on these, reaching back a firm grasp to her, to assist her as she followed. Then he made her take his arm again, and they climbed the rolling hillside.

She trembled and lost her breath with the ascent of the steep breaks and knolls. Her strength had not come back to her so that she could retrace calmly, were that all, the way she had come in the face and jaws of a tremendous terror. Rael had almost to lift, as well as lead her, once or twice, up the long steps of natural terrace. But he did it just as simply as he had lifted her into the wagon on that evening when she had hurt her knee. They were just the same as they had been before. That was what he thought she meant and permitted.

Yet he spoke one word more before they came quite up out of that wide field-solitude in which they were together. He made France sit down just below the last high roll of the ascent; and he stood before her while she rested.

"Miss France," he said, as he gave her his hand once more, to help her rise, "I cannot say it again if I do not now. You are not offended? You will forgive me, — you will let me be your friend?"

And France lifted her eyes full into his, and answered, "Yes, Rael. My friend, always."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SENSE OF IT.

France made as light as possible of her adventure in discussing it with Miss Ammah. "He was a frightful object," she said; "but he was on the other side of the brook, and when I found out it was my red cape he was after, I tossed it over to him. Lyman and Bowse took care of the rest. Of course it shook me a little."

Nobody but Rael knew how terribly near she had been to death; nobody but France knew what it had been to Rael.

Perhaps Miss Ammah, keen enough to discern that there was a reticence, observed them sharply, to judge just how far and to what it extended; she knew enough of human nature to understand that they had been brought into a sufficient closeness of experience to test whatever closeness of feeling was possible between them.

Nothing appeared, but that they did not mean she should be frightened into future anxieties, and that they were quietly friendly after all was over, as usual. If they had gone through *this*, — well, Miss Ammah began to feel, perhaps, that France was really odd enough to keep odd; and that Rael's good sense and cool self-recollection were indefinitely to be trusted.

France herself walked now in a sweet, calm dream, possible only to that beautiful girlhood which, resting in itself for the while God means in putting it between childhood and womanhood, looks on into life as a duration, pure, unfevered, of all lovely relations that can be begun in a fervor of the spirit which is not so much as touched with the tumult of passion. It had been this gracious maidenliness, shrinking from being touched by it, that had retreated, as with a caprice of repug-

nance, from the presentiment of Bernard Kingsworth's love-seeking.

She was so glad that Rael had asked something of her; that he had asked that, — her promise to be his friend, and that she had given it. It put her at peace.

She knew very well that he had never *asked* Miss Ammah to be his friend.

He was her friend, for always; and all eternity was before them.

France found herself feeling strangely satisfied. This strange, eventful summer was ending in making her very happy.

Rael went in and out about his work and his errands. He presumed upon nothing. He was chiefly desirous to prove that he could care for her, as she now knew he did, without presuming. It is possible — however almost incredibly rare — that there should be a youth of manhood correspondent to that youth of womanhood, impassioned first and for a time with an ardor at once of the highest and the lowliest, between which the eagerness of self-seeking waits as if unawakened. Especially, as here, when a definite, selfish seeking is made to seem nearly preposterous.

France, on her part, was only anxious to go on as if nothing had happened to be gotten over, to take this friendship frankly, as she desired it. She ceased questioning with herself. Those old comparisons were over. It was all settled. Rael was absolutely worthy: all her interest had been the finding out of that, and the hoping he would not think too little of her to suppose that she could find it; of all which, in the different nature of things, there had been nothing with the other. This subtile shadow of comparison was in the background.

Now she knew what Rael thought of her: he cared for her to be his friend. The happiness of that had only its own growing before it.

Within three days from the danger that had begun all this for her, and during which it had been but a silent thought between them, and their outward intercourse of the very slightest, there came fresh letters from her family, full of the engagement, of course, full also of new plans.

Mrs. Everidge wrote for France to come down and join them for a few weeks at the seashore. They were all going to Magnolia together. Phemie and Mr. Kaynard liked it so much better than Princeton ; and it would be good also for the little ones. Mrs. Everidge had decided to allow them to lose the beginning of their school for the gain of the change. She said, — " I feel that you must have had quite enough of that farmhouse and the sicknesses. How unlucky it has all been ! I want you to get something really worth while before the season is altogether gone. Besides, there are so many plans to be thought over, and you will soon be as my ' second eldest,' now. Miss Ammah has been very kind ; but I do not think she will look upon it as hurrying you away from her, after all this while. We shall expect you to meet us in Boston on Monday, the 20th. Send your trunks to the Old Colony station, and take your handbag for the night at home, as we shall. We leave again next day. Your father is in New York on business ; will come to Magnolia on his return."

Helen wrote : —

" You poor, little, unfortunate France ! it has n't been worth while to pity you too much until we could do something about it ; but we *have* pitied you, with your shut-up days in a forlorn farmhouse ; with your nursing, and your lame knee, and your broken-down hostess, and your nursing again ; everything, to the very pole of the wagon, falling through and upsetting you, in all your pleasant expectations. Why did n't you come back with papa ? It was such a good opportunity for you to get off.

" Now, we really have a chance for you. September, and even October, is lovely at the shore ; and the geese all fly away at the first cold. Just about the equinoctial, you can have your choice of rooms and the devotion of the hotel people. The knowing ones take the vacant places, the cheaper terms, and the delicious kiss-and-make-up of the sunshine. You will really get the cream of the season. There will be quite a nice little few whom you know, and — but I won't tell the best till you get here. For ourselves, we are dying — especially me,

since Phemie is of no account any longer — to have you back again. I hate scattering. It is so much nicer every way for a family to *be* a family. In such places, people are of far more consequence. The Uppertons are returning to town; that is bad; but they have to. Madam Byland's nurse has broken down, and is leaving her; and the old lady is very feeble. Enid hates it awfully, — the leaving, I mean, just as — but I said I would n't tell you; only half the girls that have been and gone will be wild when they know.

"Never mind your things; we sha'n't regularly dress, now that the rush is over; besides, you can't have had out your prettiest up there in the wilderness. I always think the height of the dressing is the height of nonsense. Nobody is anything, because everybody is everything. One might as well be a wire frame at an opening. I always save up some delicious little simplicities till the fuss and feathers are over, and we don't *call* it dress and it is n't; but it 's high art all the same, and it gets appreciated. I won't write more, for on Monday we shall see you. Kind regards to Miss Ammah."

How strangely it all read to France! Words out of a different world, from away behind her, where she had not been for so long. And they overtook her here in this quite other place of her life, where they at home knew nothing of her being. So far apart, as they begin to follow their separate lines, do those of a family drift and drift, and think they are of one household all the while!

France wrote to her mother: —

"Dear Mamma, — You are so dear and kind to me, and wish so much to give me pleasure, that I think you will let me tell you what my pleasure really is. And please let me say this: when I was a little girl, you used to say to me, 'This is best, Frances; mamma knows.' And *then* you did; and so here I am to-day, with certainly some good sense in me that I should not have had if mamma had *not* known. Now, — I mean it quite daughterly and thankfully, — don't you think the time is come when perhaps I ought sometimes to be the one to say, 'This is

best: trust me, mamma'? When it only concerns myself, I mean; if you *need* me, I won't think what is best for myself. But I am going to just dare to stay over next Monday, and hear from you instead of meeting you then; because I am sure it is best for me here a little while longer; and that, in some ways that I can't explain, I owe it to the friends I am with and have made here, not to run away in what would seem from some special circumstances a hurry to *get* away. This has been a beautiful summer to me, and has done me good. I don't want to break the wholeness of it and patch on something else. I don't feel ready for the seashore or for company, or for all the mix that it would be at Magnolia. When I come home, I want to come *right* home, with only you and the girls; especially now that so much is going to happen. I should get odd and fractious, and spoil all the other pretty parts, if I had to come down and perform among the people who will think our family affairs are just a piece of society-play, for them to sit audience at, and criticise or applaud. You don't know how different it is here among these still, grand hills.

"I have written my mind right out to you, dear mamma, and I hope you will see the sense of it. Anyway, I am always, — and waiting your *commands* if you send them, —

"Your loving daughter,

"FRANCE."

Whether she saw the sense of it or not, as such, Mrs. Everidge did not think it worth while to insist. She was a little uneasy with her conjectures, at first, and had half an impulse to write four words to Miss Ammah, — "Is it that minister?" But there was in France's letter a tone of generous confidence in *her* confidence that made it seem a sort of peeping and meanness to do that. Besides, she knew very well that Miss Ammah was just the one to slap the door in her face if she did peep.

When Mr. Everidge came down to them, she questioned him, and learned that "that minister" was no longer at Fellaiden for the present; also, that, wherever he was, he was a fine fellow, and quite above the country-parson level, and was

"worth" at least a hundred thousand dollars. In his own mind, Mr. Everidge had doubts about the dozen years, and whether the very mention of them were not indicative that France might have hastily spoken, through surprise, what she had scarcely made sure of, and if she might not, very early in their course, manage yet to make up the other half of that worthiness in which she suddenly found herself lacking. But he said nothing of all this to his wife. He would n't have France bothered. She should do as she pleased.

Of course, Euphemia and Helen said "I told you so" to their mother, and were each a little offended, — Euphemia that the importance of her engagement had not brought France home, and Helen that her charming letter, and the promotion to her full comradeship in society, had neither fascinated nor coaxed. But Enid Upperton stayed on at Magnolia, accepting Mrs. Everidge's matronizing in return for her mother's to Effie and Nell, and Helen was consoled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CROWNED HEAD.

THERE had been a suggestion at Fellaiden for France to see, or see what was to be seen from, "Crowned Head," a high summit of the Back Hills, before she should go home. This had been all put off, and apparently forgotten for a time, in consequence of Mrs. Heybrook's illness. But on the very morning of the Sunday of France's adventure with the bull, it had been adverted to again. Rael had spoken of it, as he stood with the two ladies on the piazza, where they sat enjoying the particular deliciousness of that hour between breakfast and church-time, when the hallow and rest of the day have just begun, and its early beauty is like the creation-blessing upon it.

The maples were sending up shoots of flame all through the woods, — the first kindling of the blaze that would be shortly wrapping the hills in an indescribable splendor.

"We ought not to give up Crowned Head," Rael said. "Could n't it be managed this week, some day?"

Now Miss Ammah would no more have been driven up Crowned Head than she would have laid her own upon the block, — supposing there were blocks and executions, in these eighteen hundred and seventies, and in these United States. It was a road that was travelled now only by mountain torrents, and by these, of course, not up, although forty years ago it had been a post-road from one county town straight over to another. Mrs. Heybrook was out of the question; there was only Sarell, and it was pretty evident she could ill be spared, besides that she was on a height of hurt dignity or feeling, just now, with Rael.

Rael had wondered, rather severely — with that gravity and briefness of expression that were severe from him — how she

could think of leaving for East Hollow so long as his mother wished to keep her. "She will need somebody all winter," he had said, when Sarell had spoken of October, "and she has always considered *you*."

It was hard for the girl, when nothing — not even walking pride in a grass-green silk— would have been more to her mind, if "all things had been accordin'," than to stay on with the Heybrooks through the long half-year. She shut her mouth with a secret sense of the injury that nobody knew, after she had said, once for all, — "I sha'n't leave nothin' at sixes 'n sevens, you need n't think. I mean t' see her p'ovided; an' I don't calk'late on no more jants n'r vis'tins, after Sunday. I sh'll take hold 'v the t'mayters, an' pickle them, next week; an' week after, I sh'll go inte' the soft soap 'n candles; an' I mean t' see t' the cider apple-soss; an' 'f I anyways can, I 'll come over t' the pig-killin'. But I know where my dooty is, betwixt then 'n then, ef *'t is* you, Rael Heybrook." And as Rael received her words in silence, she had turned a spasmodic choking in her throat into a desperately exaggerated clearing of the same, and resumed her mopping down of the already stainless shed-room floor, with an extra dip into the pail of clear water, and a sweep along the boards that was as good as a dismissal to him; and after she had so sent him off, flung down mop and all, rushed up into her bedroom overhead, and had a good hearty five-minutes' cry, into which she put all the misery and relief that might have consumed days and nights with a more leisurely heroine.

Sarell, you see, had to get the dinner, and she could not afford to turn her sleeping into weeping hours. She did her grief up as it came along, as she would have done any other "chore," and it was disposed of.

But she was on her dignity of secret consciousness; there would be no "skylarkin'" for her off to Crowned Head.

"Will you let me drive Miss France, if she will go, on the little buckboard?" asked Rael outright.

Miss Ammah looked up at him, straight into his modest, honest face. He would hardly have asked that of her, that way, had there been anything behind. "I don't see any

reason why not," she said. And with those words for all injunction, even if she could have seen down into his very heart as it was that day, she would have trusted him to be wise for himself and scrupulous for France. But she was really just now in the innocence of "invincible ignorance."

France said nothing, but her face softly beamed.

That, however, had all happened in the morning.

On the Tuesday had come one of those mountain changes in the weather which shut up the beauty in heavy mists, replacing it only with the rolling grandeur of the vapors, and the wild deluge of rain that sounds among numberless leafy branches and mingles its rush with the noise of the swollen cascades till the whole world seems a sweep and plash of falling waters.

It was cold as it is in September in high places when the sun hides, and Miss Ammah and France had been glad to have the little stove in the room of the former lighted with a fire, and the two chambers thrown together for the pleasant warmth. The rain and the chill had continued till Thursday, then the wind took a grand, swift march around the hill-ranges, coming out from the clear northwest, and on Thursday night there was a first white frost. It had been on Thursday that France had answered her letters.

Friday and Saturday were busy days at the farm, with work crowded forward from the early week by the storm. Mrs. Heybrook was about the house in a quiet way, and everybody was hindering her, with all possible forestallings, from finding any work to take up again. France had long since assumed the regular charge of the table business, the spreading and removing, and had instituted her own little washing arrangements on the spot, that the work might not pass over at all into Sarell's department, to make her own help a daily offer and refusal and a consequent armed insistance. Up stairs she swept and dusted, and she kept the parlor open and cheery by the daily freshening touches which country parlors are hardly apt to get, and so settle into that indescribable deadness of original pleasant order that comes from things unstirred. These things were truly among the strong motives and "special circumstances" that had induced her to assert herself as to the present best and right for

her, and stay on in the "midst" that she was making. But, undeniably, it was also that she must have a little more time now for the clear establishing of the "friendship" that had been asked and given. She could not have run away from the first word of that and make it, perhaps, the last. She must see, and let Rael Heybrook see, how it was between her and him after that close coming; that "Forgive me" which had taken back nothing, but only acknowledged what it sought pardon for. She must let him see that she forgave, that she was not afraid, that she was glad to have him care for her to be his friend.

Would he ask her again, after all, to go with him to Crowned Head? She thought she must at least wait to know; that she must not let him suppose she ran away from any embarrassment of their intercourse, as such intercourse would naturally have been.

The storm and the frost over, there came days again of glorious sunshine, and between the keenness and the softness was born the early glory of the forests. The maples were catching fire from bough to bough; the sumachs were shooting forth their crimson signal-rockets; the little birches were "dancers in yellow"; the chestnuts began to show beside them their contrasting harmonies of amber-brown; and though the great old oaks, latest to change, held steadfastly their grave dignity of green, a young sapling here and there had put on the family jewels, and was soberly magnificent with carbuncle. The colors were early; therefore would be most beautiful and perfect this year. In the warm, sheltered places and on the southerly inclines, the hardy pasture flowers were still bravely bright. It was the exquisite point of ripening before decay began.

A week later than they had first spoken of, Rael said to France one morning, "Crowned Head will be splendid now. I should like you to see it. Will you go?"

He looked at her with his grave, pleasant smile. His eyes met hers clearly. "Will you go?" was "Will you trust me?" not as it might have been, and sometimes is, "Will you come and listen to me, will you answer all I have to say?" It was rather, "I have said all: you need have no fear of me."

France met his look with one as like it as he could have prayed for. It said, "I believe you, utterly. I trust you with all that there is between us. There is nothing more to be spoken; but, happen what may, we are friends absolutely, for always." So she told him she would go.

Do you begin to blame France, according to the punctilio of the world, which the world, in its ways, needs indeed, but which might not be needed were the world's children the children of light? I think she was but following in utmost truth, so far as it opened before her, the way of her noblest, hopefulest life, and the promise of it, that could not all quite yet be read. She might be conscious that she was becoming, had already become, a great deal to Rael Heybrook in his very highest sympathies, in the very stronghold of his nature. She might know that he had never found a friend like her before. She might know, even, that if after this permission and continuance she were to go away and let it be the end, if she were to take up other pleasant intercourse and let it obliterate all this, if she were to put ties and claims that could not be spoken of here and now between her and it, — she would make this that she was doing now an injury, a wrong. But she could not possibly imagine that she should do any such thing. Whatever this friendship were, or whatever in the eternity it had begun, it should come to, it was first before and forever different from anything that could come again. She meant to live it out, whatever it should come to. She could not look forward, — she put that thought away, — but she could *go* forward, as Rael was going, as she knew he would go. All this had defined itself in her in substance during this last week, though she had not set it out in words to herself. What it might be to them, — to her, — after their present intercourse was broken, to go and to remain apart; what might be between of hindrance from the very fact that through these days there had been something that had not been spoken, and that she would remember she had turned from hearing as certainly as he had stopped from saying, — she had not realized. In the truest living there are some mistakes.

But they went away to Crowned Head together. In a joy as clear and pure as the golden day itself, — in an atmosphere as

high above all earthly cloud and soil, — they climbed the mountain ways into yet wider delight, yet rarer and more buoyant airs.

The little buckboard wagon, with its one seat tilting so easily in the middle, the low hang of it, — so that a step would take one to the ground, — the slow movement over the constantly ascending road, these were more like some delightful self-movement without fatigue along the lovely slopes, among these thousand exquisite things of late bloom and leafage, bright, running water and live glistening rock, just at their feet even, than like riding over and past them at a height beyond the enjoyment that belongs to a ramble in their midst.

They turned from the high road — if the brown, soft, narrow, winding track from point to point among the scattered farmsteads ever seems like a high road — at about half a mile's distance from home; then they began the real climb, up a cart-path traversed only by farming teams, and by these very little of late years, and by the charcoal wains that came from some coal-pits away back in the high defiles. It was rough in the extreme, or France would have said so then, before she had come to the real extreme, when they struck off yet further from frequented tracks and followed, up the flank of the Crown Mountain, what she could hardly believe had been the post-road Rael told her of.

Before they came to this they passed one solitary, poor house — a mere roofed pen it seemed — on a flat of turf where the road wound round a kind of terrace. Here they stopped for the "colt" to rest a minute or two. France asked what human being could ever have lived up here.

"O, for that matter," Rael told her, "a great many human beings *have* lived, and lived pretty well too, on this long mountain. I can remember when a wagon-load of them used to come down and round to the Centre to church every Sunday morning. But they have been dwindling out, and the houses and farms going to pieces and going wild for a great good while. One human being lives in this house now; at least, she has n't four feet, like those."

A family of pigs was rooting and smelling about the closed door; this was propped up with a timber; it kept the pigs out:

nobody else, apparently, would wish to get in. Being set against it on the outside, it gave evidence that the occupant had gone out of her dwelling. To think that it should be a woman!

"Her name is Betsey Bushell. She lived here with her father and mother; they were a kind of wandering paupers, getting shelter where they could from time to time, and finally settling here. It was coming over here, from the next county, where they were threatened with the almshouse, that Betsey lost her mother in the woods."

"Lost her! Was she never found?"

"Never so much as her shoes. She disappeared utterly. Betsey spent part of the night searching for her, according to her own account, — the old woman had stopped, she said, and refused to go on, and she herself had kept forward, thinking she would follow, but finding she did n't, went back to where she had left her, and found her gone, — and the rest of it in another old shanty, a mile back. Men turned out and searched the mountain; but they never came upon any trace. Whether she wandered altogether away and lived a while elsewhere, or whether — well, it was always a queer story, and a kind of doubtful one. Not pleasant to think of, when Betsey brought berries to sell, and begged bits of cheese and pork or an old gown of my mother."

"The father?" asked France, horrified.

"He died a few years ago. He was a dreadful character. And here Betsey burrows yet. If you were to look in at that window" — France shuddered — "you would see a pile of rags for a bed in one corner; a pile of potatoes for food in another; the refuse of a week's meals in another; an old, dirty, broken stove in the middle, and maybe a pan of meal under it. That 's what I saw there once."

"And a human creature *lives* so! Rael, it 's awful!" With the divine thrill of the real human in her at this desolation and degradation, France felt herself drawn nearer, as for refuge,— nearer, also, with the fellowship of clean and noble nature, that must pity such things with horror, — to Israel, her friend; and his simple name dropped from her lips, the utterance of that feeling.

"Yes," said Rael, with a breath's pause after the word, where he did not speak her name in like manner; "and in this beautiful place, too, with the sky and the trees and that clean-running water preaching to her all the time! It 's hard to understand."

"Or to help?" asked France.

"The help ought to have been a great way back," said Rael. "It ought to have been a hindrance."

They went on into the rocky, disused side road.

The quiet, sensible old "colt" pushed his way, brushing the branches with his head, and scrambling over the broken stones and along the irregular, nearly untraceable ruts, sometimes crossing the face of a smooth-worn outcrop of granite, in which were the old marks of wheels that had scored it years and years ago. "You can see that there *has* been heavy travel here," said Rael.

The leaves had not begun to fall; the colors bloomed from heaps of summer green; the little asters and the golden-rod and spikes of purple and of white mountain blossoms that France knew no name for, clustered by the borders; and the young, tangled woodland, that was springing up for miles where the old timber had been long cut off, pressed close upon the pass. Here and there a break of pasture-land gave freer thoroughfare and continually enlarging outlook from one opening to another. Already they could see, in the unfolding and lifting of the southern range, other shoulders and summits rearing or gliding into view than those they were familiar with at Fellaiden West Side. Behind the dark-green wall of Thumble, that began to look low upon their right, stood sunny heights, some of them with mellow patches of just-reaped oat-fields near their very tops; and here and there a distant blue, cloudy tip revealed itself between one and another of the crowding earth-waves, over whose heads the great horizon widened as over a tossed, no longer tossing, sea.

At one place, Rael stopped his horse again. "There!" he said, "it was just here. You can see the cellar-mound, all washed in and filled up and grown over. That was a house when I was a little child. Here was the old garden. See the

red balm in bloom there now, and the bushes of sweet smellage. I came here with my father, once; some old people lived here — Brayne, their name was — and the old lady gave me flowers. They both died soon after; then the house was burned; and that was the last of the place. Over there," pointing to a blackened shell of a building on the left, higher up, whither some now altogether overgrown roadway must have led, "was the Silvernails' Farm. They were Germans, from York State; then there were the Greatraxes, — they lived off a little way to the west. Why, it 's all changed in twenty years and less. I can remember all the names; there were people left of them in the town when I was a boy; but all these farms have been deserted long ago."

"Why?" asked France. "I mean, one does n't so much wonder, away up here, as facilities increased in other places, but why are there these 'deserted houses' all about? We have seen them in all our drives."

"Oh, land run out, timber cut off, young men gone off West and to the cities, and old folks dying; the mountain farms washed off gradually, and the land turned poor. All sorts of reasons; but I don't like it. I don't want it to spread; and it is spreading. I think this is a grand piece of the Lord's world; I was born here and I love it. I 'd like to be *fit* for as much as I could be made fit for; and then I don't know but I 'd like to see — well, I won't begin upon that now, though I mean to tell you, if you will let me. That 's one of the things I 'd like to talk about."

This silent, proud Rael who talked to so few! This was how he wanted her also, now, to be his friend, — to enter into his life with him, and help him to understand it.

"You need think of no *if* in the way. You may be sure that I shall always be glad that you can like to talk to me of these things," France answered him; and the gladness subdued itself in her voice as she spoke.

They came to one or two places where it was needful to alight and walk up rifts and heaps that were like beds of little waterfalls; where the colt lifted himself, and Rael, going behind, lifted the little buckboard to the upper grade. They threaded

turns where the track led them right into pieces of thicket, and they had to push the branches forward with much strength, and stoop their heads to their knees almost, to avoid the recoil; these bits passed, they seemed like gates that had let them through into new, secluded mountain chambers, where the road lay across sweet-smelling turf, and the trees stood back about grand areas, open only to the sky, and to the far-off glimpses of lines of hill-top higher yet.

At last they altogether left the cart-way, which continued on down a side incline, and through a half-way bit of valley, to an ascent beyond, upon and over another open brow of highland. Rael let down some pasture-bars, and led the horse through upon a wild, rich, moorland swell, the south-lying bosom of "Crowned Head"; where, turning at right angles from their direction hitherto, they faced nothing but its billowy rise, that swept upward toward the line of scattered pines, which, surrounding the bare, rocky summit of the mountain, showed at a distance like a circlet about a bald head, and had given the crest its name.

They left the woodland behind them; they rode, wheel-deep, through a great sea of mountain flowers and shrubs and grasses, tall, sweet ferns, and broad, white beds of bloom of the upland everlasting; blazing patches of most richly feathered golden-rods, that heaped themselves here in solid-looking banks; underneath were the green trail of creeping-Jenny, and the lovely, erect plumes of princess-pine; now and then, where this had fruited, the horse's feet trod down on to a patch of seedy spires, from which a smoky puff suddenly ascended, as if he had struck out a fire. Then there would come a little interval of waste, that was no waste; for all over the ground, that looked comparatively so herbless, stood up the modest little spikes of penny-royal, with their stinted leaves and minutest delicate-purple corollas; and with the crush of hoof and wheel, up floated the spicy fragrance, and enveloped them with its viewless cloud of incense. Among it were scattered taller stems of close-blossoming, deeper purple gall-of-the-earth, rare and precious to the country folk as a stomachic; and faint-colored, tiny, tawny blooms, spiked also, like a kind of scanty-flowering heath.

A belt of rocks stopped the wagon. Beyond this, and between it and the grand, solid mountain head, was the growth of pines. Rael unbuckled a rein, and turned a heavy stone upon its trailing end, tethering the horse safely; then he and France climbed up between the craggy points and boulders, crossed the pine-belt, whose resinous wood was odorous in the sun, and came upon the final height of the bare Head, above the Crown. Here, at first, there were lichens and deep-tufted gray moss under their feet; then the storm-washed, naked stone; at last they stood upon the highest curve, — huge, rounding away in such a stretch as to make to itself an island rim, that if you sat low in the midst, was its own horizon, and the hilltop seemed as a little planet one might walk around, yet hung there in that wonderful blue, whose sailing clouds dropped their white skirts so near.

Walking out towards its edges, was met at every point the glorious outlook, downward and off; all around from lessened Thumble, with white Scarface rising distantly beyond him; Great Quarry Hill, with the white excavation gleaming like the lines of a fair-built city against the dusky side; the dun, shadowy mass of Iron Top; the points and dips of cloud-like ranges, stretching from north to south, away down through the sun-flooded west; a pond shining in a deep nook between cliffs and forests; wooded crests, close by, mounding up like islands, or like neighbor asteroids; golden patches of sere grass or harvest stubble or ripe millet, lying bright upon their sunward slants; all the way down the soft declivities to the wide, far-below valley on the west, beautiful dints and swells of farm lands, in every lovely tint of olive-green and buff and gold, the red-brown of the ripe buckwheat, and the sunny brown of the fallows, separated and quilted down with the low-running lines of fences; white villages, their modest churches standing a little apart, in week-day stillness, under tall trees; roadways, linking them and ribboning the green; a mazy, blue-running stream marking the bed of the dale; far, far off, a dazzling shine of water, straight beneath the sun, between those faint blue slopes just under the sky line and a break in the group of nearer, smaller hills; that was a loop of the Connecticut.

Rael stood with his head bared, as he was apt to do in grand places; the wind blew his hair back and his face looked noble with the far reach in his eyes, and the strong, satisfied quiet about the lines of his lips; one hand crossed the wrist of the other as it dropped before him, holding his hat.

France had taken care not to let her hair fly; for a woman, that is hardly ever anything but untidy except in a picture; it was held in its pretty order by her veil across the brim of her hat; but the veil floated out in a soft, blue-gray haze, and her face freshened and brightened in the sweep of the breeze that came straight across those pure depths to them without an earth-touch on its way; and she glowed — eyes, cheeks, and all — with the deepening delight that she was drinking in. She held in her hand a bunch of golden and lavender and purple, with the white of the life everlasting.

They made a picture,— they two,— standing there in the midst of this wide earth and sky, the only human figures; they might have been Adam and Eve in a new and braver sort of Paradise. A few gentle-eyed cows grazed on the level just below the wall of rocks; they had lifted their heads, as the creatures might have done in Eden, to the beautiful, superior pair as they passed up; now, there was only the low, sweet tinkle of a bell coming up from beneath, to remind that any life was near but theirs, who were so silently receiving, in a happy wonder, the Word of all that praiseful manifest.

At last they turned to each other. "I would n't have had you miss this," said Rael; and "Oh, I thank you so for bringing me!" France said at the same instant, with a long-escaping breath of emphasis.

It was as if the beauty of all this, and more, had been for her in his heart; as if here there had only been something ready-made that could but barely hint what he would think and wish for her and bring her to, and as if, on her part, the joy of joy was that it had come through him. Yet they were most common words, and neither thought except most simply in the saying of them. So did they stand among most common forms of things,— grass, herb, tree, rock, sky. But there was all that could be put into such forms; it was the *much* of

it; there was all, too, that could be put into those little sentences.

"It is dry here; will you sit down and rest?" Rael asked her, and he found her a place where the rock shelved and made a seat, warm in the sunshine. A little way off, where he could just speak in a low, natural tone, and be heard by her, but without the least unnecessary approach, he seated himself. They were at right angles to each other. She faced the western outspread and glory; she had to shade her eyes with a pine bough that he gave her for a parasol; the sunlight fell upon him obliquely, sidewise, giving a glow and shade that threw out the lines of his head and face in their fine character. So he spoke, and she listened.

"Perhaps it is hardly fair," he said, "to bring you to a place like this, and ask your judgment upon the thing I want it in. There is too much in the Fellaiden scale. It is too grand to be here. You see what my question is?"

"Yes," said France. "Whether to stay here?" Her tone was scarcely an inquiry,— it was just short of assertion; and she waited for his answer.

"I want to live a life that is worth while," said Israel. "I want to make the best of myself, and do the best with the making of me. I knew I needed to learn; so I have been to school, and down there at the institute; and it opened out, and I should have followed the opening if there had not been a plain duty to call me back here. Now, I begin to feel as if the very best of me might do the best in just this spot, where I was born. I doubt if it is good for all the power — as it comes to be power — to drift together into the great centres and channels, and to leave the country drained. It is like all the blood that should be all over the body determining itself to the heart or the brain. Capacity, intelligence, right-mindedness, are needed up here among the farms. Men who can come to influence, and use influence, are wanted. If I could be such a man," — he paused a second, as if before a seeming assumption; then he went on, simply, "I should not be satisfied with being less of a man anywhere,— I would like to try what I could do in my own natural place. Things *were* pretty much settled; but

there is a fresh start and possibility, now that Miss Ammah has given me this lift. There are months in the year when I might go on with preparing myself,— I might afford to go away from home, leaving help enough here for the time,— and be ready, some time, for work outside, in the world. Would you do it, Miss France, or would you stay here?"

"I would be ready," France answered. "That is what you mean to be?"

"Yes, ready for anything, with the whole of me. The question is, where I can put the whole of me to work. A man must choose something definite, and he has to choose early. It is not so very early now, in my case. Living does n't run even, if plans are put off too long. One part outgrows another, and there come times, circumstances, when, for want of readiness, they miss the join. I won't miss anything that I might be or have; I will come, please God, to all I was meant for!"

His head went up, erectly, and his eyes flashed their proud determination straight into France's eyes, as she looked over at him. Hers lit up respondingly. "Please Him, I think you will, Rael," she answered, with a warmth as brave as his.

"Shall I go, or stay?" he repeated. "Shall I get ready with this purpose, or with that? for the purpose makes itself out. There are good, honest engineers — men who won't cheapen human life in cheapening wood or iron, or have a stroke less of labor in a work than the work needs — wanted, in all the great branchings out of manufacture and communication; and sometimes I think I should like to be there, in the thick of things. And sometimes I remember that the springs are up here, in the quiet places among the hills; and that the Pyramid in the border of the land was in the centre," he finished, smiling.

"That there are middles out in all the edges," France added, in like manner.

"Yes, that sermon put a good deal into my head," said Rael, "or put into shape a good deal that was there already. Mr. Kingsworth is acting out his own word. He keeps out of the drift of ministers,— it is just as bad as the other drift,— to where the people have everything else, and where the big sala-

ries and the easy famousness are. He is doing a great work in this out-of-the-way edge, and he wants help. There is no reason why men should not be strong — strong for the whole country and the world — in these out places. Under our government, — if it is to be redeemed and fulfil itself, — all places are in the midst. That is what I think, that self-seeking runs to the great, quick chances, the crowded places; and that half the crowded places ought never to be. That if there were none too crowded, too absorbing, there would be none too thin, too ill-supplied."

France, woman-like, catching the suggestion, sprang to grand, sweeping conclusions. "I see," she said. "'God made the country; man makes the town.' If everybody did only the true between work, — if everybody had a chance to do it, — there would not be great, overgrown cities. Perhaps men's enterprises would be of altogether a different shape, — that they would come to without expecting; that they do not know how to expect, as things are. They would scatter; carry everywhere, instead of gathering into a few great centres where they can turn things over and over, and from hand to hand, making every man his own pinch out of them. Every man would be making the most of some little piece of the world, — not spoiling it, — and everything would be brought to every man's door."

She flushed beautifully as she spoke. She had a little glimpse of a millennium. Rael's heart burned as he looked at her, and felt the woman-element, like a torch bringing down a sacred fire, touch the man's reason and purpose in him, and kindle it into an enthusiasm.

"It must be so; it must be coming," he said. "Look at these hills — these miles and miles of beautiful lands. These are the great places, the rich places, — not the walled-in streets of cities. And the *want* of the cities ought to be here; they ought to 'sit every man under his own vine and under his own fig-tree.' It is too late, as I said about Betsey Bushell, to get that present want all out into the right place, maybe; but can't somebody help keep it out for the times to come? Is n't there something for men to stay and do up here? Shall I go, or stay, Miss France, when the chance comes?"

France laughed. Her laugh was not amusement, it was just the uttered brightness of her smile. "I know what you will do," she said. "You will stay."

"Thank you," he answered her. "I wanted your word."

As if it had been her word at all! As if she had done any of the reasoning, or had persuaded him! It was curious consulting; it was only "as face answereth to face in the water," that there had been any answering from her to him. These two understood each other, after all.

France's heart beat to think of that. That these summer weeks, begun with such far-offness, such setting apart, had done it all. He had brought her out here into this glory, the widest he could show her; and here he had shown her, also, the glory of his heart.

Nothing more. He had not brought her here to say any common, selfish words to her, that it was not time to say; to repeat, in any wise, what had burst from him in that moment that was almost like a moment beyond the grave. He had promised not to do that when he had said to her, "Will you go?"

It was curious wooing. Not a word to try her mind, to draw a word or look from her to show whether she could choose the living he was choosing — choose it anyhow — in some pleasant imagination even. Not a word to make her say that she, a woman, could delight in woman's service here, where such work was to be done to "establish the mountain of the Lord in the top of the mountains," and to make the "people flow unto it." It was all man's work, man's choice, that he talked about; where he himself should set himself "between."

It was curious wooing; yet France Everidge felt herself, in some high way, both sought and chosen. No other woman would he have sought just so. She was his friend, whatever came of it. He left it, as she left it, to some sure Ordering to bring whatever should be, by the ordering of "the steps." And this step was one.

"There is one thing," Rael said presently, "that Mr. Kingsworth has in mind, and all planned out. He sees how the distances in these country places are against the helps and im-

provements that might be, and how that makes the difference from town and city living, where things and people are brought continually together. He means that there shall be a circulating library here in Fellaiden at any rate; and that it shall *circulate*. It can't be left to the chance getting of books by people who don't drive once a month — and some who never have any way of driving at all — to any centre where the books could be kept. He means to get up a book-post, to go round once a fortnight and exchange the volumes. People can make out their lists of whatever they want to read, and these can be kept at the library, the numbers crossed off as they are supplied. Everybody is to help, according to ability; then he will see that the deficiency is made up. Is n't that good?"

"It 's beautiful," said France, in a quiet tone. She felt humbled before the great goodness of it, and of the man whose whole heart and life were just full and outgoing with only such thought and deed for "the neighbor." She had dared, — no, it was not that she had dared to refuse; she had rather *not* dared to take to herself the dearest human giving of such a heart and life. It simply was not hers; he would know it some time. The great Ordering that would take care of hers would take care of his also. She felt sure he should not lose. For herself, she was so happy to sit below and wait — with Rael.

"Then there are the schools, and the social gatherings, that must be, somehow; he has them all in mind. And he needs people who will take things up with him, and help him carry them through. I believe I am right in making up my mind to be one."

"You will be *the* one," said France.

Not a word to her, even then, of what he could dream to do, with *the* one for himself at his side in this brave paradise. Would the word ever be said? The days were growing short; their lines were going to separate: how would it ever be?

They went down the mountain. They kept southward down the long ridge, until they entered the road they had first taken from the highway in their ascent; they repassed in this the wretched lair of Betsey Bushell; a little way beyond they left the more direct way, and turned again southward, along the

continued broken line of the Back Hill, descending for two or three miles the slowly lowering grade.

The sun, also, was going down his evening mountain path. On their right hand, all the west — hilltops and heaven — was full of changing lights and colors. The dusk and chill came on when a low bank of gray vapor hid for a while the sinking splendor. All at once, the rays streamed forth again; they looked round, to see one of those strange, new pictures, of which in a lifetime we see, if we watch, so many, and yet in all never the same one twice.

Fallen from under the deep purple cloud-bank, and clinging, like a fiery burr, to the long, black edge of a mountain-side, hung the sun; crimson light burst upward, fan-like, into the mist of the cloud, setting it all ablaze; its left shoot ran up the slope of the mountain, and projected itself far beyond the crest, dividing sharply the wonderful light from the darkness, away up, up, in the dense mass of vapors; the heart of the conflagration burning and burning, till it was a pure, intense clearness; the mists turning ever a richer and more vivid red; the sun still clinging, as if caught in the bristle of the piny mountain-side. At last it dropped, — slid downward and backward over the lessening spur, till it went out behind the next rising outline, as if it had rolled along, not under, the world.

"Did anybody ever see such a sunset?" exclaimed France.

"No," Rael answered. "And perhaps only we two, in all this region where it might be seen, have seen it, just this way, now."

Only they two. At the moment when he said it, that clear, whistling cadence uttered itself from the woods close by, — A-world-for-me! A-world-for-thee! They rode on silently, listening to the whip-poor-will.

Another grave of a house, low down in a bend of brook-meadow; a high hill-rampart, dark with forests, shutting it in behind; lesser hills and rises clustering all about, through which wound the narrow roadway that had brought them beside it.

There, Rael told France, was where a father and daughter, living by themselves years and years ago, had been struck by

one bolt of lightning; their untended cows had broken from their pasture days after, and wandered wildly away; distant farm-people had found the cattle, and then come to the house and found the lifeless inmates, — one at one window, the other at another, where they had been closing them against the storm, when the arrow of heaven had shot through, and left them dead in the selfsame instant. There was something dread in this chill, solitary, deep-shadowed place; there was a strange shudder in the air; the presentiment of death that must come had waited here with the night-time at the mountain-foot, after all the joy and beauty of their dayshiny pilgrimage. It was minutes before France could quite draw natural breath again, from that sudden awe of the happening of "years and years ago."

Then she said, "What histories of one old mountain you have told me to-day!"

"And how much older and full of history is the mountain!" answered Rael.

"And what atoms we are in the whole earth, and the story of it!" France said again.

"Yet we are here, and there is a way for us in it; because — don't you remember, don't you think so, France? — because the Lord is the Lord of *hosts*."

How, in such a sentence, could he put the little word of human distinction?

"That is so much easier a way to think it," France answered low, "than to have first to think one's self up *out* of the hosts."

"People waste their strength, trying to believe in themselves," said Rael.

They went down a steep, scrambly, hazardous side-track from the ridge into the village road. It was dark here now. But France was not afraid: the chill and the shudder had passed; they two, in the glory and in the dread, had been, and were still, together. There was a way for them in the earth, because the Lord was the Lord of hosts.

For the first time, she had heard Israel speak that Holy Name; and for the first time, as in that very name, he had spoken her own, in the way that friend may call a friend.

As they went up Fellaiden Hill, from the north, the side of

the Centre Village, and came out upon the broad table of the summit, they rose up into the soft twilight again, that had been quenched quite out in the low woods. Along the street, wide here, on the high level, and grassed at each side with a smooth turf for many yards, they met people coming home from their day's work or absence. A long timber-wagon, emptied of some load it had transported, turned out for them. The saw-mills were a mile back, down in the gorge. Rael stopped, and called to the man who was walking beside his horses.

"Good evening, Mr. Osterley. I was wanting to see you, about some lumber stuff. What can you let me have shaved cedar shingles for, the thousand?"

Mr. Osterley took off his hat with his left hand, passed his cart-whip over into the same, and with his right hand rubbed his right ear between thumb and finger. He looked down upon the ground, as if he kept some calculation hidden in the earth, and were consulting it. "How many d' y' want?" he asked lifting head and eyes suddenly.

"Whether I want them at all will depend upon the price," said Rael, "perhaps five thousand."

"Well, I 've got some, — *good.* I 'll let y' have 'em f'r three dullars an' a quarter."

"Then I don't want any," answered Rael, with perfect pleasantness. "Good evening, Mr. Osterley." And he gave the colt the hint with the reins, and the light buckboard rolled off along the soft, soundless road. Mr. Osterley was left standing with his ear in one hand and his hat and whip in the other, forgetting all three. He had posed himself, bodily and mentally, for a long Yankee haggle. He expected, in the end, to sell his shaved cedars for about two-seventy-five, twenty-five cents, at that, more than they were absolutely worth; and that Israel Heybrook would talk him leisurely down the extra fifty. He thought there would be just about time, between daylight and dark for that. And half the pleasure of selling anything, to Mr. Osterley and hundreds of his kind, is the slow approach to the bargain. But here was Israel Heybrook, off at the first jump.

"That is one thing," Rael said to France, as they drove for-

ward, "that somebody has got to begin to put right. I mean there shall be one man in Fellaiden who everybody shall know will name his own fair price, — I don't say *lowest*, because there ought n't to be a higher than the right, — at the first word, and who won't pay hours and minutes, as well as dollars and cents, when he wants to buy. That man would have been glad to get two-sixty for his shingles. But I won't chaffer. It 's like tittle-tattle or a quarrel. Somebody 's got to stop short, or there 's no end to it."

France thought of the "custom that was the law of life."

"But won't you have to run the gauntlet of all the people who have lumber to sell," she asked, "and come off, at last, without your shingles?"

"Maybe, for once. In that case, I 'd put off my shingling job, and consider I 'd done better. If I begin young, I may come to be understood. Where I know what I can give or take, I won't ask or offer twice."

There was an inflexibility about Israel Heybrook, that it would be hazardous to run against.

France was set thinking things of him, silently, by those words. And she remembered them many times long after.

Miss Ammah was on the west piazza when they reached home. Mr. Kingsworth was with her. He had come up this day from Boston, and had stopped here, on his way over from the village, with their letters, just as usual.

He met France with the smile that was always his first bright encounter with his friends; it was as unhindered to-day as it had been that first day when he had found her here.

Was that strange, did she think? Bernard Kingsworth was only "acting out," in this also, "his word,"— the word that was a living thing in him; not, even to himself, a pretence. Did she suppose he had been afraid for "the hairs of his head," all these weeks? that he had hidden himself, in that mere cowardliness?

There had been time for Miss Ammah to tell him that France had gone away this afternoon with Rael, to Crowned Head. There had been time for whatever question or thought of possibility might have come with this. Even yet, it had not driven him away or made him afraid.

Had not "the Lord's wish been in the midst of his wish"?

Yes, in the very heart of it, he knew; that which himself, even, had not penetrated to. Not in the outside way of it, yet; perhaps it would never be. But the live depth of it was kept safe, somehow; he never doubted that; for he had heard and had taken to himself the word, "Your heart shall live forever."

Is it strange to you, who read, as it may have been to France? Is this an anomalous, impossible man I tell you of? I only tell you of one in whom was the grain, as a grain of mustard-seed; and to such there is no mountain that cannot be lifted off, that the grain may grow up, strong and beautiful, into the light.

Whether it be believed or not, I think it was truly more Bernard Kingsworth's desire that the *right thing should be*, than that anything should come to pass in his own way or choosing. I think if there were an act of his — a staying or a going — that could have helped, or shunned to hinder, aught that might be coming, right across his own first seeking, to these other two, he would have gone upon its errand for them, or have stayed to smile as he had done to-day.

Yet his feet might no less have felt the stones as he went; the pain, for long yet, might be no less under the smile.

Miss Ammah had business letters, and she resolved to-night that she would go down next week. She might return to attend to her new business here; but the thing in natural order was that she should go to Boston now. And the natural order was that France should go down with her.

Miss Ammah Tredgold, also, did the right and obvious thing, and believed in the appointing of the order.

There was only one especial word between France and Israel, the day that they said good-by.

"If I could only take a little bit of Fellaiden down there with me!" the girl had exclaimed, looking out on the morning among the hills for the last time.

"There is a little bit of Fellaiden gone down there before you," Rael answered. "I wish you would look after Philip Merriweather in any kind way you can. He is a fellow who will go

with all his might for what seems to himself the best thing. And there are so many different bests, you know."

"I know," said France, looking up in that brave, good face. "And I will try."

She felt as if he had shared something of his best, most generous self, with her, in telling her a thing like this to do.

It was taking her friendship, her perfect understanding, her sameness of feeling, for granted, just as she would have him take them.

Was there anything just a little *too* settled, and of course? Was there anything that had been passed by, given up, perhaps, on the ordinary road to such a sameness and understanding?

These questions might be coming to her by and by, when she should have plenty of time to be looking back, and thinking all these things over.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAFEGUARDS.

The three Miss Pyes had each a timidity. It was inconvenient that there should have been these three individual forms to the family nervousness. If there had been but one, the family life could have been more easily and less restrictedly shaped in accordance. As it was, they maintained, in certain quite unusual and laborious ways, a perpetual triple system of fortified, fire-precautionary, and meteorological defences. You will infer that the three terrors were of burglary, conflagration, and tempest.

Miss Charity, in opposition to the spirit of her christening, looked upon mankind as a race of thieves, upon the gentle peace and shadow of night-time as a misguided ordination of Providence, which simply sheltered the infernal side of human propensity and procedure. She slept with a revolver between her pillows, but not the pillows that were under her head. It was a case constructed expressly for the safe keeping of the weapon, of which she stood only in less dread than of the robbers. It was, in fact, two pillows, stoutly stuffed, sewed together at the sides, and shrouded in one round cover like a muff. The muff stood upright at her bed-head, the pistol was thrust in at the the upper end, the muzzle of the fire-arm pointed downward through the floor. Nobody could be hit by it, should the ball go off in that position, and pass unspent through board and plaster, unless such person, neither rationally nor rightly posed or disposed, were standing precisely on the top of the Stewart stove in the hall-alcove below.

Miss Charity had also invented an alarm of her own, in the connection, by certain wires which crossed various probable points of a predatory passage, — such as the china-and-silver-closet door, the heads and foots of staircases, etc., — with

another equally ingenious adaptation of the hot-air passages of a disused furnace, which communicated through floors and partition walls with each story of the dwelling.

The Pyes abjured furnaces. The late Captain Pye had resisted them, and inculcated the principle of resistance in his family. They ate up the air; they were sure to burn the house down, which fell in with Miss Bab's particular horror; and they needed the further provision of a coal-mine in profitable operation under the cellar-floor, to keep them in blast. So Miss Pye had utilized two or three of the flues in this manner: she had had the pipes refitted, and caused light wire nettings to be arranged within and across the register-mouths, held by a hinge on one side, and a loose pin upon the other. Upon every one of these she kept piled a small cairn of old croquet balls, collected from her friends, though not to the same extent, as some people collect postage-stamps. The wires, latched invisibly across door or stairway, and carried, after the manner of bell-hanging, to the pin-heads, let fall, if run against, the nettings; consequently, a shattering avalanche, that crashed down with awful and enveloping sound, as if the moment's mean little iniquity had been the last exceeding touch that overpoised the equilibrium of the universe, and the wreck of matter had begun. If you ever dropped a thimble or a penny down a register-pipe, you can estimate what would be the multiplication of the marvellous reverberation by the force and spherical quantity of a dozen or two hardwood balls bounding and plunging along the ringing tunnels from either or both upper floors to the cellar. If it did n't drive the interlopers out in disorder, where the six barrels could finish them comfortably, they must be less susceptible to quakings than brave Mother Earth herself. As, however, there were also precautions in the way of iron lattices or bolted inner shutters to all the lower windows, and a kind of toll-bar against every inward-opening door, which was lifted nightly into sockets across it, there had been, in fifteen years, but two occasions when this local convulsion had startled the household. One, when Miss Mag, indifferent to fire or thieves, but quick to the first mutter of distant thunder or a roar of wind in the chimney, had been waked by a flash of April light-

ning, and set off impetuously to fetch her silken thunder-robe from a far closet across a bit of landing to which an up and a down half flight of stairway led; and it had been a mere mercy, through a desperate clutch at the baluster, that she, as well as the balls, had not gone from the top of the house to the bottom unnoticed in the general crash. The other, when Miss Barbara, reckless of tempest or trespassers, but sniffing continually remote and impossible odors of burning, had gone forth, in a like midnight manner, upon a smelling quest. But as Miss Barbara moved heavily and slowly, — without a light to the surer discovery of smouldering sparks, and fending before her with her bent arm, — she had simply sprung the trap, and sat down, safe and confounded, upon the landing floor.

Miss Barbara kept matches in a stone jar, with a heavy top, in a locked cupboard. She dealt them out, broken carefully single, three nightly, to kitchen and each bedroom, in covered tin boxes, — requiring of everybody, from guest to servant, that the burned ones should be replaced in the same; and every morning she investigated and counted up. She interfered seriously with Miss Chat, who was equally anxious to reconnoitre her wire lines the last thing, by insisting on creeping about to have the last sniff and peep herself wherever a light had been. She kept a row of her father's old ship-buckets in either hall and across the kitchen, painted a flame-red, that might of itself have given a sudden panic to unaccustomed eyes; and she had a big bell hung in what the captain had called the "cupelow." Miss Mag had rebelled against this, as destroying with its ugly bulk and trailing rope the prettiness, and almost the availability as a resort, of the nice little octagon belvidere, to say nothing of the danger of its diverting an entire bolt of lightning away from the rods right into the house; but as an auxiliary to the other uproar in case of an invasion, it carried the vote by two to one, and was established.

Miss Mag, on her part, gradually instituted these things: her thunder-gown of black silk with a large hood, that would envelop her whole person; a most bristling and elaborate system of conductors upon the house, superintended in their erection by herself, with a scientific treatise on thunder-storms

in her hand, and a professed practical electrician at her elbow, the rods carried out like iron roots in every direction underground from the building, terminating in cistern, well, and drains; an arched cellar-chamber, cleared of barrels and old iron, for retreat in tornadoes; and a couple of supernumerary feather-beds, stowed with intent and foresight in a closet, where Miss Mag had actually been known to betake herself in a hot summer night, and plant herself, as Miss Charity did the pistol, only with muzzle uppermost, to bide and breathe as she might until a heavy shower had passed.

The three ladies had lived without male protection ever since their father's death. Now and then, Miss Charity, the only one apprehensive in a direction in which masculine support could be supposed of much avail, had mooted the desirability of adding to their establishment in some relation, either of friend or servant, one of the class that, according to her anthropology, consisted of but two orders, — rascals or complimentarily ordained catchers of rascals. But the uncertainty lest she might stumble upon the wrong natural division, added to the remonstrance of Miss Barbara, who knew he would be smoking in his bedroom and carrying matches by the gross in his pockets and leaving candles burning in a draught with the curtains blowing in, and to Miss Mag's objection that some of them were still young enough for a friend to seem questionable, and a servant would be a perfect fifth wheel in the daytime, and never wake up if he was wanted in the night, had kept the idea chaotic.

This very early autumn, however, of which I am writing, an occurrence befell which brought it out of the vagueness of suggestion into the force of direct and pressing question.

One lovely September night, fair with stars and a low moon in the west, when the lights in the house had been extinguished, and the three ladies and their serving-woman, whose early habits were well known, had been for some three hours sleeping behind their bars and hurdles in the usual quiet, the thing happened which might have left Miss Charity with a sense of wasted life and capacity if it never *had* happened. Their house was entered.

Entered in the meanest underground way, through a cellar

hatchway, where a load of wood had been thrown in late in the afternoon, and the covers closed down upon it, so that access from below, to draw the bolts, had been impossible. When Miss Charity asked her servant, as usual, if the bolting had been done, the girl had answered, "No 'm. But no created creechur could get in through them three cords of wood. And the stairway-door is both locked and hooked and wired and tabled." So they went to bed in peace.

By midnight, full one cord of that wood lay carefully strewn upon the soft outside grass; a pathway downward had been made, and the hatchway doors folded back, and "*left*,"— as Miss Pye observed, as if the care of fastening up after himself might be expected from a sneak thief,— in such a breadth of invitation that "there might have been a steady stream of them pouring in afterwards till daylight." This statement, however, anticipates the after-investigation.

It was about quarter past twelve, when Miss Charity first thought she detected a faint, indefinite disturbance, and rising, began her familiar, tiptoe, hearkening round, in the safety of her own chamber, from door to door, and window to window. She could see nothing, for her room was not on the hatchway side; but her sensitive, long-trained organs discerned, among the throbbing silences of the night, a motion,— dead footfalls, somewhere, upon dead ground. Every perception in her was alive to a kind of odylic consciousness, in which she would have had a sense of a night-bird's shoot through the air or a field mouse's rustle through a grass-patch. She was sure she had been aware of that muffled stir, that vibration of some live doing, in the house away beneath. She felt, now, rather than heard, that some one — some thing — was going, carefully and weightily, along upon the ground outside, within the premises. There was a smothered rumble. If it had been Mag that heard it, it would have whispered to her, unmistakably, "Earthquake!" But earthquake was not in Miss Charity's department, only the still, small human sound. She put on her gray flannel gown,— her feet were already in her bedside slippers,— drew with much distant caution her pistol from its feather holster, opened the door into the east passage,

and crossed it to Miss Barbara's room. Bab never locked her door, lest, as in a story she had read, the key should drop out of the key-hole with her agitation in case of fire, and she should be left groping for it on the carpet while the hot smoke should rush in and suffocate her.

"Pshaw!" said Miss Barbara, from under the bedclothes; and twisted herself over with indignant determination to sleep on.

"There 's somebody here!" Miss Charity enunciated in a slow, awful whisper, and with a tone like the announcing of disbelieved doom to a sceptic.

"Five-hundred-and-forty-ninth time," as slowly rejoined Miss Barbara, in a monotone, through lips that evidently refused to more than part, lest their motion should arouse other bodily activities.

"There 've been five hundred and forty-nine wheelbarrows, then, with five hundred and forty-nine tubs of butter and hams and salt fishes and beef roasts, and whatever else was down in the refrigerator room,— and men wheeling them straight along from the cellar corner to the front wall," retorted Miss Chat, more rapidly, but in the sublime calmness of the realized worst that had long been looked for,—"for that 's what I see this identical minute, from this window, and am — going — to fire at!"

But to fire she had to raise the window, at which sound the man dropped his wheelbarrow handles and flung himself instantly behind a huge, low-spreading Norway spruce, where he lay flat upon the ground. Miss Charity, with the utmost method, but with averted head, stretched forth her weapon, fired, and cocked and fired again; one,— click,— two,— click, — and so on, six several times, at nothing in particular.

At the end of the exercise, the marauder — five hundred and forty-ninth of imagination and first of reality — stepped serenely forth into the soft, clear light, resumed his wheeling, and cut boldly across the gravel-sweep before the assembled faces — for four women were looking out now, over each other's heads — to the regular entrance, and thence down the shaded streetway below the heavy hedge. A few paces off, they heard

the load hastily tumbled into a wagon, and this driven recklessly down hill and away.

The nearest neighbors, a furlong or more off the other side, alarmed by the shots, hurried, on foot, with inquiry and assistance. Meanwhile, the bell was rung and the catapults were discharged. People rushed in, breathless. The three sisters were in their long-premeditated array for night-sally,— namely, three gray dressing-gowns and three full-plaited round muslin caps,— and the servant-maid in what she could catch up, which was an afghan and a towel; and a procession was instituted around and through the precincts, resulting in the discovery of the open entrance I have described, the wheelbarrow tracks across the lawn, the wheelbarrow itself, borrowed from the shed, its wheel well greased, and left behind upon the roadside,— and precisely the articles missing which Miss Chat, with presence of mind that would pass into a tradition, had enumerated.

The last scathe and scorch of rebuke had fallen upon Miss Barbara for her contemptuous doubts, when she saw the burned ends of dozens of matches lying scattered upon shelf and floor, and on the very wood-pile, by whose light the prowling plunderer had found his way and made research for his spoil. From that hour, her midnight anxieties joined themselves, inseparably, to those of Miss Charity, and went — *offensa et defensa* — hand in hand.

Not to make too long an episode of an occurrence which was an epoch only in the Pye family, and is of the merest incidental consequence to our story, we have only to make the connecting link by noting that the horror was in its early delicious retrospect, bringing in its first returns of that enjoyment which was to be as a life annuity now, for which the sum of one night's agitation and loss had been well paid in, when Miss Ammah and France Everidge came down from Fellaiden; and that it was in an early call at the Nest that Miss Mag rehearsed to the latter, in her most graphic style, what "Chat and Bab and I" had endured and said and done on the occasion. For it was to be observed that, although it was Miss Chat's especial estate that had come in, so to speak, and the other sisters — to resort to slang — had never taken stock in it,— these other two

were concedingly ready, now, to help appropriate its dividends of honor; as, to do them justice, they would, on the other hand, have shared nobly whatever might have fallen more directly to their own credit in the way of burning up or blasting down.

"And so," wound up Miss Mag, "we all say now,— Chat and Bab and I,— that before the long winter nights come, and we lay in our coal and our vegetables, and our kindlings and our butter, and our apples and our salt meats, we really must have a man in the house. And because if we had anybody of any kind of an age suitable to any of ours it would n't be suitable at all, you know, we think it had better be a boy. At least, not a *child*,— of course; just more than you could exactly call a boy, but might say a young fellow, that would have come to size and strength, but not to misconstruction. And — well, Chat, perhaps you 'd better explain the rest."

"My sister means, I suppose," said Miss Chat, in the clear, common-sense way that she especially affected upon business, "what we have talked over among ourselves as to arrangements. There is n't anybody we would quite care to invite, or that would wish, probably, to be invited; and it would make things more comfortable and independent on all sides, if some moderate equivalent were taken. We have no occasion to *make* money,— that way."

"No," put in Miss Bab, who always did put in the key-word and fact, "we only want what will even the accounts. For we don't quite feel like *extra* spending, you see. The truth is, we 've locked up a pretty good amount lately, that we shall have to wait for till it pays in; and it does n't leave us anything — *this* year — to spare."

The little grandeur of manner with which Miss Bab measured her sentence, and left a possible magnificence of disclosure to another year or day, was lost, for the moment, on France, whose mind shot instantly to that "little piece of Fellaiden" she was commissioned and promised to take kind thought for. It would be a good thing for Phil Merriweather,— a most safe and excellent thing,— if from the wide range and irresponsibility of the life in the great city upon which he was just loosed,

he could come out here upon his gentlemanhood, to take trust and charge with these good, simple ladies. Miss Chat's next words fixed themselves to what was in her mind, and so brought her mind to the perception she had been missing.

"A young man with business in the city would be what we should like, for several reasons. It would be out of the question having him about, or in and out, all day long," she said. "But a bright young fellow,— coming home at night to bring us the news, and word of how things were going; and perhaps now and then to look into a little matter for us, that women can't be on the exchange to look after for themselves," — here Miss Chat pushed up a completed knot, and shifted the threads of her macramé, and took an air with her head of that large, reticent dignity which seemed to be just now running through the family,—"would exactly answer our idea. And if six dollars a week would answer his,— with his mending looked to a little when his things came home, because I could n't face my conscience in putting a pile of holey socks into a man's drawer, and three of us here of the sewing kind; especially if he kept that little eye on the market that we might know better whether to sell out or hold on,— only for that he must be smart and comprehending,— just *any* kind of an image in pantaloons would n't be worth while, you see!" And Miss Chat concluded her sentence, quite unconscious that she had left her premise waiting lamely far behind for a forgotten consequent.

"I think I know, — it is possible, — I might mention it. My father has a young man of that sort just come into his employ. But, dear Miss Chat, I don't mean to ask; only is n't the market dangerous for women?"

"That 's what your father says, I know," returned Miss Chat, with superiority that had a remote, delicate flavor of resentment. "Men think a good many things are dangerous for women. But there 's an old saying about the goose and the gander; and maybe it 's sometimes true turned round!"

France could not push inquiry; but she went home with two questions in her mind to ask her father. What he had ever said to Miss Charity Pye about investments? and, What sort of a home, if he knew, Philip Merriweather had got in the city?

To the first, — "Miss Pye had come to him last spring about mining stocks," he said. "Somebody had put it into her head that I was interested in them, and that everybody was making fortunes in them. But I advised her out of it."

"Are you sure?" France asked with anxiety. "Because they say they have locked up money somewhere, and have n't all they usually have to spend."

"I gave her the best of my judgment," he answered hastily.

France did not say anything to that. The thought that arose in her mind was, "Not the judgment you used for yourself, papa!" But that would be disrespectful, and she did not say it.

"Women ought to know when they are well off!" Mr. Everidge exclaimed, with impatience. "They've no business in among the wheels! Those girls had their money all in safe old limited stocks, and seven per cent company mortgages. If they've been risking in fancies, they'll just as sure come out shorn — "

"Perhaps they have n't. I've no right to say so. Only they spoke, I thought, — it was but a few words, — as if they had inconvenienced themselves just now, but as if they expected some great thing of it, by and by. What they really talked about, was having some young man in the house this winter, for protection. And I thought of Philip Merriweather. Where is he now, papa? Would n't it be good for him?"

Papa was a little bit cross. He was beginning to find his neighbor too much for him.

"I don't see, France, why you need to trouble yourself about this young man," he said.

Those words, "young man," were pronounced as they only are in giving a check to a young woman. There is nothing like that kind of check for putting a woman, young or old, aside with; and all the father, brother, and husband-folk know it right well. But there is a counter-check, — the conscious or unconscious fact, concerning some one out-of-the-present-question person, which sets a woman triumphant and superior above all hint or mention of any of the world's other hundreds of millions. Mr. Everidge might as well have said, "I don't see, France, that you have any need to trouble yourself about that

pen-rack," in which at the moment, as they sat by the library table, she was carefully rearranging the pens and pencils that had been shaken from their rests by the newspaper he had just thrown by. France went silently on with her work.

"I like to see things — and people — in proper, safe places," she said. "And I promised some of Phil's friends that I would have a thought for him. He is a youth who will take vehemently to whatever he thinks is best worth while; and I suppose he may be easily mistaken on that point."

As she quietly re-presented Rael Heybrook's word, when at Rael Heybrook's name she would have had enough to do to take care of her self-possession, she might have been a hundred grandmothers for her absolute outgrownness of any girlish implication as to "young men."

"So you propose to take him in hand? Is that it?" Mr. Everidge spoke half with his first slight irony, and half with a new amusement at the tone the girl was assuming.

She answered with the entirest gravity. "Yes, papa; that is what I mean to do, in a way, if I can. Some of us are responsible, I think, now that he has come down out of that simple Fellaiden life to work for you. Won't the best way be, perhaps, for you to ask him out here some day? Then I could talk with him; and I don't see exactly how else I *could* manage it."

"I should think so! But how are you, or I, going to pick out Phil Merriweather from the rest for our especial devotion? There are all the other clerks and shippers, why he? And *here* are your mother and the girls" — Euphemia and Helen were "the girls," the little ones were "the children," Fran' was always just "Fran'." — "What will they say?"

"It will be you who will say, if you think right, papa. And I don't know about the others, the clerks and the shippers, at present; I only do know about Phil. Where is he living now?"

"Somewhere at the South End, I believe. I've no doubt he's found a comfortable place; he seems satisfied. And he works well. I have my eye on him, and I think he'll do."

"Anyhow, I should like to see him. Because I've promised his friends."

"Some of us are responsible." Those words of France's remained in Mr. Everidge's mind. And something, just the least look, in Phil Merriweather's eyes the next morning, as if they had had too much and too late gaslight, struck the merchant's quickened observation of the boy, and underscored those words.

"I can't undertake to stand between them all and all Boston," he thought, with a certain resentful impatience. Nevertheless, the impatience had now to be with something that had begun to be alive in his own mind. It was not anybody's saying, that might be forgotten. It had begun to say itself.

So one day, before the week was over, he did ask Philip Merriweather to come out to his place and see what the country was like about Boston. "My daughter thinks you may be missing the hills and home," he said; "and I believe she has something to speak to you about. We dine at five."

There was a certain distance in the very ease of that way of putting it. There was nothing to hold back from. All there could be of approach or mutual concern was set forth at once. My daughter had something to speak about. She might have had that with a mechanic. The mechanic would have been sent to the door only; Flip was to go in and have something to eat: things were just as definite in the one case as in the other, however.

There was a train at 3.15, which the merchant often took, and took to-day. There was another at 4.20, by which the clerk would have barely time to render himself; and he was left, naturally, for he was on the wharf with a bill of lading when Mr. Everidge went up town, to get through his work, change his dress hurriedly at his boarding-house, and follow.

France found a difference in Flip Merriweather; something was gone out of his merry audacity already. He did not look at her now as he would have looked at a bird in a tree, or any other beautiful, free thing that was safely enough away from him, perhaps, and plumed as he could not be; but that, yet, he was on the same plane of freedom with in his own way. He did not look as he had looked among the hills. He was toned down; or he took a tone lower, involuntarily, in her presence.

It was not the realizing of differences that he had not known of while he only knew the hills and the hill-people; there had been differences enough there; and as soon as Flip Merriweather realized a new or broader thing, he realized himself directly into it, not aside from it, potentially, at least.

Still less was it awkwardness. He showed unusedness, perhaps; but it was a very alert and capable unusedness, that only wanted, and did not miss, the cue. With his quick adaptability he had not been a month in a city boarding-house even, without catching certain externalities which are a great deal more generally learned and adopted than the fenced-in few suppose, and are the last things, now, really to distinguish anybody, whatever the Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table may have found true, or have reordered by his ukase, twenty years ago. Our young fellow, Phil, said neither "How" nor "Yes" interrogatively, now. He had dropped these easily enough, and picked up glibly enough the current, "I beg your pardon?" and "Is that so?" which, without essential superiority, correspond. He had soon observed that a dinner-fork is not ordinarily held or managed like a pitch-fork; and that coffee-cups have the suggestiveness of handles, and do not need the embrace of three fingers and a dip of a fourth. He had learned to break bread before spreading it, and to dispose of solid food before taking in liquid; also the grace and comfort of a touch of a napkin between the two. He was guilty of no *gaucherie* at the Everidge dinner-table.

But when France sat down to talk with him afterward, left to her as he was by the elder ladies of the family, she saw then that not an ignorance, but a knowledge made the boy conscious before her, and took down his mountain boldness. Some touch of the world had taught him, as it taught Adam in Eden, to turn shamefaced. It was time already she felt, without distinctly discerning why, that her errand had come to him.

She had the quick, heavenly wisdom to move straight upon the truth. She told him what she wanted of him, then she said, "It will be best for you too, Philip. I do not think it can be good to come straight from those pure hills into the thick of city living. The air tastes bad."

And her clear girl's eyes — clear to the element of the thing, but pure and unconscious of particular — turned themselves full into his. They reached through to the best of him, like the sword of the spirit. They came in time, while the bad air did after all still taste bad.

He thanked her in very meek fashion for Flip Merriweather of the Thumble-Side, said it was good of her to think of him, and that he would be glad to go and see ; taking his hat as she asked him to do, and walking with her down the hill to the Pyes' Nest, as Tobias went with the angel.

It was quickly settled. Flip, good-looking, boy-young and man-strong, fresh and keen in business ways and wideawakeness, to be away all day and home by eleven at night at the very latest times, "which he would n't care about often," he said under the pure blade-flash of the angel eyes, and in Mr. Everidge's employ, with France to especially indorse and befriend him, was exactly what the Miss Pyes had figured among themselves. On the other hand, the Pyes' Nest, with its quaint, pretty ordering, and Misses Chat and Bab and Mag, with their home-like patter of kind talk and the fun that he could see in them, the gable-room they showed him, that looked out upon a bit of the river and a turn of the railway just before it reached the border of the village whence it made his ready link with town, and a peep in passing at the exquisite ready-laid tea-table, in whose appointments the maiden sisters were curiously nice and fanciful, — to the flare of a teacup-rim or the turn of a smug little creampot, — just took the fancy of the boy from the farms, to whom they opened pass for him right into a life that the South-End boarding-house was far away outside of.

"And you will soon not be a stranger here, and you will have us to come and see," France said, very sweet and sisterly. And so the agreement was made : a week after Flip came out with his valise-trunk to the Nest, and things that they did not exactly take into account were more closely linked together than any of them knew.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BOLTS AND BONDS.

We must go back into the summer, — into the day on which Sarell had been borrowed for the exigencies at East Hollow, leaving those of Heybrook Farmhouse to fare as they might. She had come away with Hollis Bassett, under the mild regretful sufferance of Mother Heybrook's parting glance, and the condemnation of Israel's cold shoulder. She wondered proudly and mutely if some time they would n't know better; know whether she had counted this bit of her life dear unto herself; whether, in her loyal desertion, she had not been braver than if she had stood by.

The very climax and break of the whole hot thunder-breeding season came in the tempest of that afternoon. East Hollow lay straight in its path; straight in the range from Sudley slopes to the south valley.

It grew dark in the low-ceiled farmhouse. Mother Pemble could scarcely see to count the stitches in her new quilt-stripe. Uncle Amb was rather feeling his way among his familiar bundles of papers in the old secretary than examining them or deciphering their written indorsements. He was looking for a certain parcel that he knew of geographically by its location in division and pigeon-hole; specifically by feel and complexion, and the grouping of the labelling lines across the corner of its outward wrap.

Every once in a while, with varying impulse regarding the affairs the papers represented, according as his moods of conscience or of self-seeking got the uppermost, he had been used to draw forth the file and carefully restudy the documents, even the far-back document of all, as if by any new searching of familiar word and phrase new aspect might be given either to his obligation or his prolonged evasion. This was not so

very strange a play of human nature: men search the Sacred and Immutable Word itself, as if with some such vague and blind expectance.

There lay the old bond, then, cancelled long ago in the court records, but of which he had kept this copy,— a life in itself looking forth at him if ever he half turned to destroy it, which would not let him take its evidence away. Perhaps he was afraid, in that part of him which recognized a truth and justice with which sooner or later he must make himself at one or be eternally condemned, to put away the kind of external conscience that it was to him, lest by the sign he put away also the inner sense that was the spirit of God; the sense that kept him from altogether letting go the original fact as past and done with, and sliding into an established acceptance of the resulting situation as a mere "unfort'nitness" which he and his half-brother had somehow fallen into together, and which together they had simply got to bear; the latter the more easily of the two, because he had his boys and his brisk wife to help him, while Deacon Amb had only himself, "an' all them wimmenfolks a hangin' on to him." Truly, in his ordinary consciousness, this was almost the way, if he had defined it, that it had come to look to him; even, at times,— especially paying times, — as if the main misfortune had been Welcome's own, in which he had become implicated. Yet something, back of himself, had kept him, all the while, from an act that should seem to abnegate, or release him from, the truth. He did not mean, in the long end, to violate or defy this inmost of him; in other words, to lose his own soul.

"Ef he should be spared to them ninety-nine years an' a week, an' be prospered,"— that was what he had always said to himself, or to the overhearing Providence, holding on to it as the leading phrase and condition of the contract,— then, long before he went to his great account, he should settle this small one squarely with his half-brother; although, indeed, there was a proviso by which he felt Providence was doubly secured, and a way of escape by the same loop left open for that conscience of justice in himself: if things *did* happen otherwise, the law would turn over to Welcome, or his boys, what would more

than make it good; seeing that there was no child here, nor any closer kin; and he never meant to make a will. Care'line had the farm; and her halves of whatever else there might be would be all she had any right to look for. No; Mother Pemble might watch and hint and hector; but he never meant to make a will.

With the bond were tied up all accounts, receipts, etc., that there had ever been between the two men, of other and more ordinary nature; also the memorandums of the sums "advanced" from time to time to Welcome Heybrook, since that interest-paying on the mortgage had been going on. The balances by which Heybrook had made up the payments, or the quarterly amounts he had often been obliged to furnish wholly by himself, had been scored only mentally, with the accompanying honest intentions; being always easily arrived at in these lookings-over of the record, by the simple subtraction of the loans from the aggregate of the regular percentage. Ambrose did not like to put too many items in open black and white.

During the last year the deacon had been in less danger of slipping into that fatal ease of conscience against which the bond stood as reminder. There were other things, now, to keep him from forgetting, and from feeling too comfortable in the suspension of the claims he was so virtuous in not repudiating. They were the things, in short, that moved him at the present moment to the revolving of certain plans and devices from which should be a beginning — kinky and crooked, to be sure, and returning upon themselves — of the magnanimous final restitution. But we will take him up where he sits, now, at the old secretary, in the thunderous gloom of the August afternoon.

The heavy cloud, rolling down over Sudley Woods, spreading above the Centre basin, and gathered again before the great rush of the wind that compressed and drove it between the towering mountain-spurs below, hung close with its massive drift above the Hollow Farm and its neighborhood. It grew darker and darker.

Mother Pemble dropped her knitting-work, with its steel needles, into the wide bag at her bedside, pushed a pillow down

between her and it, and lay back with hands piously folded. Uncle Amb fumbled on at his papers.

"How you *ken* set there, with all them brass handles an' ornimints, an' them three sharp knobs a-pintin' up overhead, an' all them keys a-danglin' at y'r elber, it passes me t' know!" apostrophized Mother Pemble. One would think her tenderly solicitous for the deacon's safety; but however that may have been, she at least did not want him sent for, then and there, before her eyes, by any sudden, visible dispensation. "It 's a temptin' o' Providunce," she said.

"*That* don't tempt it," the deacon answered with assurance. "Providunce *ain't* a dunce. We sh'll all be called when our times come, an' not a minute afore."

In his limited apprehension, he partly and dimly conceived that the Overruling Power might be in some measure persuaded by this frank crediting of Its Wisdom,— partly held real underlying confidence in that time of his as comfortably fixed,— and greatly relied, at the actual moment, upon being so righteously employed as in the very business of the Just Dealer. "Heirs and assigns." Those were the words that were running through his mind as he turned over slowly the docketed files.

The heirs and assigns of Ambrose Newell, in the old trust deed; the heirs and assigns of Welcome Heybrook, in the old trustee bond. How, even in the statutes of men, it was provided that the acts of the fathers should be binding upon the children, and that the children should pay the penalties!

That they should avenge the rights, also.

Ambrose Newell, childless old man, had these sons of Welcome's, heirs to them both now, to deal with. They did not come into the instrument except as heirs. He had no consciousness of how it had stood between them and the life they might have chosen; of any inheritance or right which he, through it, had already robbed them of.

But they were to be dealt with now. Those boys had come to the front. Those boys had suddenly turned into men; had taken upon themselves family interests and responsibilities, and understood, now, from the bottom, he had every reason to suppose, family affairs and history. In the first years of the

difficulty that had come upon their father,— when their mother took to entertaining summer boarders, and so kept them at their studies a while longer,— they only knew of it as "an obligation father had signed away back years ago, for Uncle Amb; and that had come down upon him through Uncle Amb's losing money." They knew the farm was mortgaged and interest had to be paid; that in consequence Lyman could not go on fitting for college, or Israel finish his four years at the Boston Institute, and then go to Germany. From being "forehanded," and able to plan great things scarcely before heard of among the simple farm folk, they had to come back to hard work and close management and plain prospects. But they naturally, as time went on, found out the why, and the condition and the extent of their hindrance. The result was — especially with the proud, silent Rael — a deep contempt of their uncle, the meek deacon, which the latter realized in a certain quiet, absolute avoidance, and by and by in a withdrawal of any business reference to himself on the father's part, who ceased to come to him for help to meet those quarterly "li'bilities." For six three-monthly returns of interest-day no item had been added to that memorandum of "advances." When he ventured to approach the subject inquiringly with Welcome, he had been briefly and gravely answered, "My boys have taken it in hand."

"Well," the deacon had returned sheepishly and hesitatingly to that, "ef they want any help abaout it, ye know" —

"They won't," interrupted Mr. Heybrook in the same short, staid way, "not 'ntell ye c'n help 'em left the *prenc'p'l.*"

That lay with a weight on the deacon's mind. His time did not look so long or so sure to him. The question of demand and exposure was shifted. It rested now with these boys, one of them already a stern, upright man. He would not like to have Israel Heybrook come to him with the old quiet interrogatory of his father, "Have n't you anything to settle it with?"

Uncle Amb had drawn forth from a big wallet, one after another, three of those crisp, crackling documents, the merest rustle of which went straight along all Mother Pemble's nerves,

as over the wires of a telephone. He had laid them in the open middle compartment of the desk between the pigeon-holes, then he had begun searching out the old deeds and accounts.

He had been into Hawksbury the day before, and had had a long talk with Squire Puttenham.

At this very moment, Squire Puttenham, who had manifested no haste yesterday to conclude the matter inquired of and suggested in their interview, was struggling slowly along on his lean sorrel nag against the swelling rush of the coming tempest, up the ascent from the South Thumble Valley.

He was almost at the turn where the meadow road came down by a short crossway this side. There he would be comparatively sheltered, and a few minutes would bring him to East Hollow. He was accounting to the deacon, in mental rehearsal, for his seeming urgency. "The cloud was n't in sight when I left Hawksbury," he said. "And I had business over to East Centre. Thought I 'd look in here, an' finally had to." But not a word of all that did he repeat when he got to the deacon's door.

Uncle Amb sat at length with the papers in his hand that he had need of. But it was too dark in the low room to read them now, until the cloud should have passed. He laid them back with those other clean, crisp sheets into the wide middle compartment of the secretary, closed the rolling front, took the keys in his hand, and then, before locking the desk to leave it for the compulsory interval, he rose from his seat, and stood by the front window beyond it, to look out upon the storm and judge of its probable duration.

At the instant, a roar and rush descended upon the hollow from the black north, — a hurtling sound, as great, jagged ice-fragments came down in fierce discharge before the blast, shooting in oblique, deadly lines upon the harvest fields. They beat upon the long slant of the farmhouse roof like hammers. The glass lights of dairy and shed-room began to shiver in upon the floors. That lasted scarcely for two minutes. If it had gone on for ten, the grain would have been ground in its sheaths, and the old shingles would have been riddled as by bullets.

It paused as suddenly as it had set on. Then, a long blue quiver from overhead streamed down and backward from the

southward-hurrying cloud athwart the very ridgepole, rending the air as if it were a solid substance ; and distinctly the crack and split of timber was heard in that long awfulness which a second of time is filled with, when, through every separate particle or fibre of thing or soul, the shock is felt and followed that overwhelms it.

Mother Pemble sat straight up in bed. Deacon Ambrose neither saw nor thought of her. How he never knew, — whether by outward force or inward electrifying that sent him with involuntary spring, impossible to his mere muscles, — he was hurled from the window, and found himself staggering backward against the opposite wall.

Whatever action or movement of his own had immediately preceded the catastrophe was for the time obliterated from his mind. His right hand was benumbed, then it quivered and stung with pain.

He blundered to the door, made for the back rooms of the dwelling, he knew not why, — following instinctively the fearful rush of sound that had swept over him for an instant and left as it were an echoing trail in the mere memory of hearing. It was simply all of him that could remember or retain.

Sarell and Hollis were out in the shed-room. They were crowding up some old mats against the broken windows. Care'line was in her bedroom. The old man passed everybody by, went in a half headlong fashion, as if the strange impetus which started him were not yet exhausted, to the door in the far end, and opened it right out against the columns of the now driving rain.

A huge buttonwood tree that grew by the corner of the barn building a few paces off had been rent straight down its trunk. One half had fallen ; it stretched across the crushed rails of the hog-pen, and heaped its branches high up in the garden beyond.

The defining of the occurrence restored point and balance to the deacon's mind. The fresh, sweet air — the bolts of rain, their tremendous discharge, instantaneous and complete, like each successive outrush of the tempest, were already shortening and thinning, and the clear, blue light was sifting through the

clouds — revived him. He stood in the doorway, and remembered his poor swine. He gave the familiar call to them. Not a squeal or a grunt answered. Three magnificent porkers, as they found out presently, lay there dead.

But the house and the barn were spared. A delicious breath, that could hardly be of the same atmosphere that had brewed the hurricane, stole gently through the opened rooms. The sun shot a long-slanted beam, that turned the tree-bosoms golden, and kindled the mercy-sign in loveliest color against the sullen, distant-dropping vapor-masses. The very hailstones had not melted yet under the fences; but the bruised cornblades were shining in a new, sweet light, and all forth into the deep and tender west, wide gates began to open on a lavish, compensating glory.

Everybody but Mother Pemble was out there by the door, breathless with the amazement and the sudden peace. And old Squire Puttenham, forgetting to give a reason why, came riding, pale and dripping, into the house-yard.

It was a good ten minutes after, — when damage had been hastily reconnoitred, when Squire Puttenham, shivering, had looked over the fallen tree into the *débris* of the pig-pen, upon the huddled bodies of the swine that lay in a limp, strange heap, as if one boneless, jellied mass; when he had ejaculated, with a certain restraint, being a non-professor, "Well, Deacon, that's a turrible sort o' thing, ain't it?" and Ambrose had replied, diaconally. "It 's *sollum*, Square! It might 'a ben you or me!" to which Sarell, a little in the background, had responded with innocent great eyes and a tinge of the same devoutness, "Jest as well as not!" — it was then that Care'line recollected the east room and its helpless tenant.

"Do, f' mercy's sake somebody go look after ma!" she said in her soft, large-vowelled way. And Sarell went.

The deacon bethought himself of hospitality, and led the old squire in to the kitchen fire.

Mother Pemble lay looking after the deacon. Was he struck? she wondered.

But she heard his steps, recovering themselves as he went to something of the usual shuffle, continue on through the

opened house-way. And presently Care'line's ponderous, but elephant-like cushioned tread follow, with such rapidity as was consonant, after him, from her bedroom. Even electricity would take appreciable time to thrill through Care'line, or send her anywhere.

Then the horseback rider passed the windows; and then came all the voices and the moist wind through the rooms, from far away there out of doors.

Mother Pemble's eyes had not waited for her ears. They were used — her senses — to swift division of labor. The deacon never departed in ordinary fashion that she did not follow his track searchingly, as if some clew or testimony might have been dropped in it.

This time something was dropped. Off there by the cupboard wall lay the sacred, inaccessible bunch of keys. At last her chance had come.

"It took a thunder-clap to do it, though!" Mother Pemble ejaculated in a whisper, as she got up on her knees in bed.

Soft, reflected light was smiling in at the front windows. The storm was broken, and was drifting harmlessly off. That had been the whole of it. "An' it was *sent*," Mother Pemble said to herself, with the piousness that seeketh and findeth its perverted own.

If it had still been *sending*, she might have suffered the tortures of Tantalus, with her opportunity lying there before her eyes, and remained passive. In that blaze of heaven she would have been afraid of the touch of something, perhaps, more essentially dangerous than the dangerous metal. But under the restored light of common day, and in the common equilibrium, things that glared and thrilled with sudden threat subside swiftly into passive innocuousness. There is even something exhilarant and intensifying to the habitual mood and motive in the reaction to it from what momentarily drove it out and now puts on to calm review a morbid color.

She had a right to *know*. That, at least. She had waited for something like this, she knew not what, and it had come. There was not a second to waste in hesitating. For *doing*, — for following up with after-measures, — there was no question of that at present.

Uncle Amb had left her door, every door in succession, wide open. There was no latching down or shutting in. He would recollect or reason well enough that it had been so.

But Mother Pemble had practised certain motions like a cat. In an instant she had slid from under her bedclothes and slipped across the room.

For a half breath she hesitated with the bunch of keys in her hand, and her glance directed longingly to the secretary. But she glided back, plunged her hand into her bedside bag, and drew forth a key similar in size to the longest, slenderest one of the deacon's. These two, sliding her spectacles down from the top of her head to her nose, she carefully compared; put wards to wards, and measured their divisions; nodded her head, with eyes of delight, seeing that her own differed only in respect of a single projection, which was a hair's breadth too wide. *It had almost fitted.* Why not quite, she had not before known.

She set her ears like a hare's for another second's listening. Then she dropped her own key back into its place, flitted over to the panelled wall again, and noiselessly deposited the bunch precisely on the spot whence she had lifted it; listened again, and with swift steps reached the secretary. She was pretty sure he had not fastened it. This chance had seemed of itself to be enough till her eyes had fallen blessedly upon the other. Now, "please the pigs," — she actually uttered that fetish-invocation in her eager glee, not dreaming how with grim grotesqueness it applied, — she would have both. But the one that gave a power, to which the other would but confirm a satisfying motive, had been made sure of.

She tried the little brass knob. She was right. The grooved slide rolled back.

Inside, directly before her, lay the papers, — three, large, new, separate, sharply folded; a thin bundle of others, old, narrow, corner-curled, irregular.

She noted, instantaneously, just how they were placed; then quickly ran through the fresh sheets with a half unfolding of each one, frightening herself with its crackle, as she listened keenly beyond it all the while for any movement toward her in the house.

They were bonds for one thousand dollars each, two of them headed, in a clear, handsome, semicircular line of copperplate lettering, "Rutland Railroad Company;" the other, with its conspicuous horizontal imprint, "United States of America," bearing at top, in two comfortable little curves, "Five per cent Consols" — "of the United States."

"I knowed it! I *knowed* it! An' I'll lay my life there's *more* on 'em!" The barefooted, spectacled, nightcapped old lady chuckled as she tremblingly replaced them, her eyes fairly scintillating sparks through her glasses.

Something tingled in her ears with the excitement that confused her listening; a panic seized her; she dared not examine the tied-up parcel. Hastily adjusting them all to lie precisely as she had found them, she rolled the panel forward, turned toward the bed, and had just passed round its foot when Sarell's brisk step came along the passage.

Mother Pemble had but one thing to do, and did it.

She stretched herself down upon the floor, face flat and arms out-flung, close beside the standard of her table and partly beneath the hanging folds and fringes of the valance.

"Oh dear! *Oh* dear!" she moaned then, as she lay there, and Sarell came in.

"Is that you, Care'line? I thought you 'd *never* a come, — noan on ye!"

She had made a mistake there; she could not think of everything, and Sarell caught her up.

"Care'line!" she repeated scornfully. "You know better 'n that. *You* know a wheelbarrer from a hayriggin'! You know best how you come down *there*, Mother Pemble!"

"I don't know *nothin'*!" whimpered the prostrate woman. "The deac'n was in here; I don' know! I'm right here where ye see me. 'T would n't be strange if we 's both struck."

"I should n't persume it would," assented Sarell coolly, for the second time, "only you ain't." And she stood stock still, looking at her.

"Ain't ye goin' t' help me? O, ye crewel-hearted thing! Ain't ye ashamed? Do fetch somebody an' left me up! Oh dear!" and "*Oh* dear!"

"Humph!" said Sarell, deliberately advancing. "I don't want no help. Nor you neither, Mother Pemble, more 'n you 've hed these seven years, an' that ain't mine nor Care'line's nor yet the Lord's!"

She stooped down and put her strong arms around and under the limp figure that had not grown heavy with the years of presumed inaction, but had rather thinned, Mother Pemble's life being more that of the nerves than the nutrition. She lifted it with pure mechanical power, and no slightest motive of tenderness. It might have been a log and not a woman. She laid it in its place among the pillows, drawing up the coverings over it. Then she sat down in the nearest chair, with her face toward the bed. "You 'd as good 's not be left alone again, I guess," she said.

"*Oh*, yes!" Mother Pemble answered in a humble, long-suffering way. "Y' ain't bad t' me after all, Sarell. Y'r bark 's worse 'n y'r bite."

"So 's a miskeeter's," returned Sarell. "But it *means* bite, too, ef y' don't look out, an' so there 's fair warnin'. I alwers respected a miskeeter f'r that."

Mother Pemble changed the subject. "It was an awful clap," she said, still feebly. "*Somethin'* must 'a ben struck, — ef 't wa' n't the deac'n 'n I."

"Thiz three hogs killed," Sarell answered in the same unmoved manner, but with the least exquisite emphasis on the numeral.

At which point Care'line entered and Sarell departed, leaving mother and daughter to their own inquiries and explanations.

The deacon came in, with no personal inquiries, his hand in his pocket, and making straight for his desk.

"Where 's my keys?" he said then, withdrawing his fingers from the unaccustomed emptiness, and regarding the secretary-front, from which nothing dangled.

"I must 'a hed 'em in my hand. 'T ain't locked! Where be they?" and he wheeled, with the vague, angry challenge some men use in such perplexity, upon the two women.

"Why don't you look the way you went, Ambrose?" his

placid wife interrogated. "Things seem to have flew. Here 's ma ben tumbled out o' bed, an' Sarell just picked her up."

"He don't ask after me," parenthesized Mother Pemble's exhausted whine.

"An' the clock 's stopped," went on Care'line, without change of tone. "An' there 's your keys, I guess, over against the winscot."

The deacon picked up the keys as if she ought to have spoken before.

He looked into the secretary, saw all as it had been, then closed and locked it with a more vigorous twist than usual, and went forth again to join Squire Puttenham, with whom he presently walked away into the barn.

Half points only were made, in any reckonings, by what had happened.

Mother Pemble had seen with her own eyes those precious bonds. But there still remained the anxiety as to what the deacon might mean or manage to do with them.

Sarell Gately, with her own eyes also, had had evidence toward a fact which she believed existent; she too might have "laid her life there was more of 'em." And yet it had been but half evidence, she was constrained presently to acknowledge, though she had so boldly put it at the moment to the abject old woman. Rashly, also; there was nothing to gain by precipitancy. Who should say that in such fright and shock a partly helpless creature might not have half flung herself and half been flung, or dragged from bed to floor, as she had found her? Just how much Mother Pemble was able to do remained unproved. That she should have got so far and no farther, — but *had* she got no farther? Sarell wondered when she heard about them, whether Mother Pemble could possibly have had any brief handling of those keys. The question in that case was, what she could possibly have accomplished by it?

Sarell could not altogether "riddle it out." But she came afresh to one conclusion, confirming her mind in it. That it was high time some honest folks should have a leading hold of the ropes at East Hollow; and that it was her manifest destiny to establish herself there, in the winter that was coming, as Mrs. Hollis Bassett.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CASH AND INVESTMENT.

Deacon Newell and Squire Puttenham had been talking about investments. Hawksbury was the northern village of Reade, the point nearest to the White Quarries, toward which, in the years of the stone-working, its growth had spread. There were sharp, stirring men there. Reade was a business town, the provincial centre; there was capital there, and enterprise; it kept up a live connection with the great world of stocks and interests.

"Nothing better, after all," the squire had said, "than good, paying first mortgages. Can't melt down nor run away. Same time, I 've got a good many of 'em and things are stirring. Any spare cash on hand, Deacon, you 'd like to put into a good note and security? I might pass one over to you, if you would."

"Sech as?" inquired the deacon, adding, reservedly, "supposin'?"

"Well, there's one on that new block of Liscomb's. Lets out first rate, you know, and interest sure; or perhaps that 's too big, — four thousand. I 've got one on a couple of town lots, them of Schatter's, jest round from the Baptist Church, on West Row, seven per cent, — twenty-five hundred; neat little pattern for you 'n me both. I don't care about taking in more 'n that, at present."

"Have n't you got something on Heybrook's farm?"

"Oh yes, of course. But those boys are working to take it up. It 'll begin to come in next quarter, should n't wonder."

"I might like t' see about that, ef I could. That 's all in the fam'ly."

The squire demurred.

"I 've alwers calc'lated t' help Welcome out o' that some-

time," the deacon resumed thoughtfully, "ef I was spared an' prospered. But I 've never see the day that I could do much about it, right out. I 've hed things draggin' on me. Ef I *could* take hold an' buy it up, now, o' you, an' the int'rest kep' on comin' roun' t' me f'r a while, — well, gradooal, you see, I might work it, an' I sh 'd hev my hand on it. I could kinder hand it in most any minute, 'cord'n' to circumstahnces, or make sure that 't wa'n't a hole in Welcome's share — or the boys' — after my time. I ain't got no children y' know."

The squire looked at the deacon keenly. "What 's the kink there, I wonder?" he said to himself.

"Don't exactly care about transferring that," he returned, somewhat shortly, keeping his searching look on Ambrose's face as if to watch the test, and see how deep the idea lay with him. But Ambrose Newell was as wooden as the big chopping-log in his own chip-yard, and as hard to move.

"I ain't petickler, nuther," he remarked stolidly. "I like things that 's cash or investments, ary one, 'cordin' as y' hev occasion. I ain't in a hurry to tie anything up yet; can't lay by s' fast but what I know p'utty well what to do with it. But ef I *was* to buy up, that 's all I was a sayin', — well, I would n't want it no further off, nor no differ'nt, than jest that ol' li'bility o' Welcome's. I kinder *hed* turned it over in my mind that I might take hold of it that way. But 't ain't no matter."

"If he had stopped at the first sentence," thought Squire Puttenham, carefully balancing, "it might have looked like the upshot. But he *wants* it. It 's what he came for. And there 's a kink to it."

It was plain, anyway, that the deacon would put his cash into nothing else. And the squire wanted just about three thousand dollars to change into some new stocks that Flynton Steele had dazzled him with.

Flynton Steele was a man of half the squire's age, and he was full of the affairs and chances of the day. The two had had their heads much together of late. The squire, with his rusty, old-fashioned business habits, but an eager outlook on the brilliant rush and movement of a time too young and shifty for him to keep personal pace with, was with the man of active

operation as an old lady, half slipped from her dear life of dress and fashion, is with the younger one who can always come and tell her what everybody is wearing, and just how to cut her new gowns, or make over her old ones to most magnificent advantage.

And Flynton Steele happened also to be Care'line Newell's double cousin, once removed; her very next of kin, after her mother.

We hear much, in a moral way, of the subtile interlacings and complications of human motive, act, and influence. Here in Hawksbury was a sufficiently neat illustration of it, in a nice little cobweb pattern that is small enough to be easily and entirely traced. And Flynton Steele was as a brisk, athletic spider in the middle of it.

He had a line that ran in among Squire Puttenham's plans and good solid mortgages; and another, — longer, slighter, more swaying, more dependent on contingency, — that reached out to East Hollow Farm, and caught there to he was scarcely sure what, in a dusky, half-explored corner.

He fraternized and advised with both these men, the squire and the deacon; so he did with a good many others. He had got hold, in a limited way, of the ideas and links of things that were making the fresh excitements of the great markets; and had managed to connect himself, usefully, with certain handlers and manipulators of shares and values down there in the city, where he spent now some days of every week.

There were nice little hoards of good, honest money around here, in a region where men were still somewhat easy in believing what was told them. He had worked up some very pretty little percentages, both for himself and for some of these other people; for although there were chances in all business, as he reminded his friends, and every venture might not tell in the right direction, still there must be enough tickling of profits to keep up his influence and opportunity; and many a sale of far-off Nevada or Colorado shares, that would help, in the brokers' bulletins, toward the lively general impression desired at the moment concerning them, and many a shrewd, quiet by-conveyance of the same, managed by him, worked over against

each other at once for the satisfaction of the men who backed his activities with a certain base of operating funds, — for his own commissions, — and for the little speculations, which his passing knowledge of how these or those rates were for the time being bound to rule, enabled him to carry out. This, at least, is as far as I understand about it; what I have to do with is merely his relation to the direct interest of our story, and the fact of the curious play and connection of things that has been spoken of.

The deacon and the squire never knew that they were in Steele's cobweb: they thought they were spinning their own lines, and so they were; for it is exactly thus these interlacing meshes are made; everybody's little purpose runs its own way, only here and there, finding the perhaps unfastened intersections, some shrewd Araneid crosses and catches his thread where it may make an assured and busy centre for himself.

Mr. Flynton Steele usually began the subject with the squire; it was certain to work about to the deacon; and then the deacon was as certain to work about with the idea so suggested to himself. Mr. Steele did not care to put himself forward openly and voluntarily to the knowledge or handling of Ambrose Newell's affairs: he answered his questions; he gave him what he asked for; and he meant sincerely enough to counsel or conduct for the old gentleman's direct profit and benefit, according to the Golden Rule, — which operated here as a plain statement of act and result; doing for the deacon being precisely the doing by that same means as he would himself some day, be done by, if the "times came round."

The deacon had got fired up about those Nevada shares; but he did not talk that way about them to the squire; he only listened, with eyes a little wider than he was aware, to what the latter let fall as hearsay, and with the wise distrust that is so apt to be a secret, hankering credence; adducing what "they said" in ostensible contrast to a sounder common sense. All the while that the squire was quoting wild speculating rumors in comparison with, and as argument of preference for, his own, old-fashioned, slow-and-sure methods and "paying first mortgages," he was moving cautiously and covertly, and

seeking to move the deacon collaterally, toward a transference of some of his closely secured funds in that very same hazardous direction.

They were upon a small scale, in a mere corner; but they were working by the same bad, strange law that has got hold of men everywhere; that will hardly let any purpose come face to face, right out, with any other. Is this odd machine, — this world that labors so with the crooked indirections of its multiplying powers, — ever to come simple again, and, keeping its growth of wisdom and appliance, work straight and even? How can we look for it, while it counts and works by separate, covetous, distrustful ones, and ever less and less by honest twos and generous threes, that dare to gather together in the name of a Living Truth and Love, and deal with each other eye to eye and heart to heart?

Ambrose Newell bought up the mortgage; he paid those three thousand-dollar bonds in exchange for it; then, with an easier conscience and a "livelier hope" he went and put the half of another thousand into Flynton Steele's hands, for a week or two, as a trial. "From two to five per cent a week," was what Flynton had told him things could be made to turn over, by such persons as "knew how."

He had not many more of the fresh, crispy papers; he could not have paid up his debt to Welcome and have had an equal share of his savings to himself; that was what he had been waiting for; but now it looked as if there might be ways of stimulating, as it were, the promises; swifter means of putting himself in the way of "being prospered."

If those boys came in with a payment on the mortgage, — the interest and possible payments were still to be collected for him by Squire Puttenham, — then that sum, doubled if he could double it, and if the trial investment came out well, should go into these new channels; and if he could make things grow as Flynton said they could grow, after they had once attained a certain size, — if he could put in, by and by, for some big bite of a big apple, — it might come so as that he could get that whole old score, back interest and all, off his mind without feeling it. He wanted that big bite first. He wanted to play with

the whole bag of marbles awhile, before he paid back the lot of them he owed that would so shrink it down; and yet his magnanimous avuncular heart warmed itself quite suddenly up with the reflection, "What a fust-rate job it 'll *be* to 'a made out for them air boys!"

I don't suppose he was all alone in the fashion of his living between an actual, daily wrong and a sublime, constantly intended right. I am afraid there is no such altogether odd thing in the world as the one only man who would do that.

In September, then, Israel Heybrook paid up five hundred dollars on the three-thousand-dollar mortgage, into Squire Puttenham's hands. It was indorsed on the note, and came right round with it to Deacon Newell again. Then Deacon Newell took his own first five hundred, that had come back to him from its dove's flight with an olive-branch of some twelve per cent gain in five weeks, put the interest in his pocket-book, and sent forth the principal with Israel's five hundred, to buy more marketing.

This time, Flynton put him into a "western railroad teter." Bee Line was going up slowly from low figures; Grand Tangent was softly dropping down. Flynton Steele had another comparison. "'T is n't so much which cistern looks the fullest; the question is, *which way is the long leg of the siphon?* Grand Tangent's drawing off; the little Bee Line 'll be over the brim in six months."

And so it was; and in that time six hundred more of Israel Heybrook's was in it, and that other five of Uncle Amb's from the fourth bond, and the odd hundreds of makings and savings from ventures and farm profits, and a fresh, whole thousand, — the last that had been in the big wallet the day of the storm.

Three or four times that winter, Uncle Amb sat at his desk, pen in hand, dipping it and letting it dry, as he held it over the mortgage deed. At last, one day, some strong angel who would not suffer him to drop into lowest perdition, grasped the momentary will of him, and with the half voluntary plunge into act — as it may have seemed to himself — of a suicide, he wrote three lines across it, and his name.

A long, hard breath came as he finished, and "There! *that*

much can't be took back!" escaped him in an undertone. Mother Pemble knew some deed was done; but she did not even dare to get up on her knees in bed, to try if she could peer over and discover what it might be done about.

Only half done. Would it stand, "if anything happened"? It must be witnessed and recorded. Meanwhile, it went back, with its three lines of cancel and discharge, into the old secretary again.

Some souls have to be saved by inches.

Mother Pemble kept her sentry, — if you don't know what that originally meant, it was the duty of the man set to look after and take care of the dirty water gathering in the bilge of the vessel, — over every sign and movement, silently, in these days; carrying on such history as she could from watch to watch. She could only hypothesize; she only knew that there was "pussonal," in one shape or another, in the old desk, and that Ambrose was "fixin' things." She kept on with her counter fixing. All through those weeks she was doing, at secret intervals, with her door latched, some new, strange, patient work, — work with a thin, flat file, rasping monotonously back and forth, upon a stubborn little bit of steel. Slow work, long waiting.

Some souls, also, — and seemingly to their relish, — are damned by inches.

And all winter long the shares of the Bee Line, whose certificates lay there with the Heybrook mortgage, went up and up, till they more than half doubled their par value. "Those big fellows from the Grand Tangent were in it. It was pretty near time for the little fellows to get out again," said Flynton Steele.

Through the winter Uncle Amb seemed bright and strong, better, since the steady cold had set in, than he was before he had that summer "poor spell." He drove in and out of Hawksbury, and boasted that he was "good yit, athout patchin'."

Mother Pemble said to herself, "Thiz a kind o' smartness that comes jest after somethin's gi'n up. Spells o' strong, an' spells o' weak, that 's the way it toes off; and thiz a piece gone ev'ry time. See how 't 'll be, come spring."

Sarell, too, — meanwhile become Mrs. Bassett, — thought forecastingly of the spring, and kept her faithful eyes open clear, and her wise mouth close shut. Shut, as the time went on, upon a half-changed sense of things.

Down in her heart, some feeling that had been reached by that summer sermon of the "midst," would now and then be conscious of a pain. "It 's sorrerful t' see, in two old, dyin' creeturs," she would pause and think. "If they could only be got at, now, in th' room o' bein' got round, — but they 've got to be got round, whether or no. I wonder — only I 've no business, I ain't pious, — if that ain't jest the same kind o' wish an' worry the Lord hes t' git along with f'r ev'ry one on us."

All this, however, just now, anticipates.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"WALKING PRIDE."

It was decided that the Everidges should not at once take the house in town. The wedding was fixed to be in November: all must be left till after that, and then it would be late in the season to make such a move. They might decide to take rooms after Christmas, but the whole subject was put by for the present. All things were merged in the beautiful confusion of clouds of lace, cataracts of shining silks, soft heaps of delicate woollen stuffs, furs, feathers, velvets; the glitter of colors, the scatter of finishing trifles, gloves, handkerchiefs, embroideries, lovely ties and fichus, exquisite slippers and marvels of hosiery; over and above all the regular parental providings, the coming in of gifts, — silver, art-objects, all imaginable luxuries of personal and household appointment, toilet elegances, mirrors, flagons, sconces, bronzes and porcelains, rugs and screens; to descend to particular and instance, — five bannerets, ten fans, sixteen Japanese trays, eight brass dragons, seventy-two Majolica butter plates.

One room was given up to freight, one to merchandise, one to machines and seamstresses and Paris patterns; the family was absolutely crowded into corners. It took one servant's time to receive at the door; another's to drive about with Euphemia's gratitude, done up in scented, monogrammed stationery. It was difficult to realize that there was anything else whatever going on upon the small, round world. It was still more difficult to realize that it was all about Mr. Sampson Kaynard, or that he would ever be able to take it all, bride included, who was so very entangled and inaccessible among her preparations, away.

They called France in to the trying on of the wedding-dress. The room was all wedding-dress. Her sister looked at her from

a far environment of white glory, around whose verge family and attendants were carefully hovering. It rippled and glittered and flowed, misty with lace, frosted with silver-broidery, orange garlands falling along its drifted folds like flowers of snow on snow, orange blossoms crowning the head and clustering upon the bosom about which the slight beginning of it all was fitted, and the growing splendor thence swept down and away, like the shining trail of a comet from its small, distant nucleus.

France stood out in space, by the doorway. The dressmaker and the sewing-girls were in ecstasies. To have got all that together, and to have fastened it with any sort of logic to one little figure of a woman, was their triumph.

"Look at France's eyebrows, mamma!" cried the bride, from over the border. "She puts it all into them. She won't say a word."

"Don't you think it is *love*—ly, Miss France?" appealed the dressmaker.

"It is a lovely — glacier," said France slowly. "But I don't think I should exactly like to be dressed in a glacier. It will go all down the church aisle, Phemie. And how will you turn round? And won't it make Mr. Kaynard's coat-tails look very queer?"

"France! you 're too odd to live!"

"Phemie!" expostulated Mrs. Everidge.

"To live in Boston, at any rate," amended Euphemia.

"Nothing is too odd to live in Boston," said France pleasantly, "and you 're beautiful, Effie, but you 're a great way off."

"Come round then."

France went round and kissed her.

"Right here, where you really are, it is exquisite," she said, "but it ought to be you, and not a river of white satin. Look at your two little feet and then at all those yards! Have you tried to walk?"

Effie made a few steps forward: the billows of satin crawled; they clung and drew back upon the carpet. The dressmaker spread out the hem. "It is so stately!" she said. "And up the aisle, — I 'll be at the door myself to draw it back the last thing as you go in, — to the wedding march, you know; why, it 's the whole *making* of a bride!"

France remembered Sarell Gately and her way of saying it. "To walk pride in. Don't they walk pride in Boston?" And she still wondered what there would seem to be of Mr. Sampson Kaynard beside it all.

Very much what there might be of Mr. Hollis Bassett beside the grass-green silk.

Truly there was not so very great a difference.

Sarell wrote France a letter to tell of her becoming Sarell Bassett. It came just in the midst of the more elegant presentment of the same human experience.

"I presume youl want to know how the weddin was an about pearin out. Mrs. Heybrook wanted me to be maried thare, but I diddnt seem to feel as if it wold be the best. So twas at Cerinthy Jane's. Come to, twas past over prutty simple. Cerinthy Jane coudnt have much of a housefull, count of its not bein much of a house and thar bein the baby. I did alwers think if twas ever sos that I shoud be maried, I d have a weddin that I coud remember it by. But you hardley ever cary out all you mean to in this world. I kinder dropt off one thing after another that diddnt seem to be of any everlastin conserquence when you took em up an lookt em over seperit, but altogether thayd of made the weddin, though the mane thing is to get maried to be sure, an I mean now to setle down on that an be contentid.

"I had a kind of stoncolord tybet turnin on the blue, polanay cut in tags an bound with blue, an a blue fethear in my hat. That was to travil in. We was maried in the mornin an had cake an wine, an then went down to Creddles Mills on the stage an took the cars right up again to Reade. We had dinner at the Podunk House, an a girl that tends thare used to live over our way an knew me, so she had it all out that I was a bride, an the people in the parlor (only they wasnt thare morn one at a time) looked at us while we walked up an down on the balcorny. Thare want any body thare but an old gentleman and his wife, that seemed to be passin threw, and she said my dear to me kinder simpathyzin, and a man that travils with siscors and pocket-books and *his* wife, and a school teacher and a book-agent that tried to sell us a parlor table ciclepedior, and Hollis told

him we haddent got our parlor table yet. And no lezhur company at all but us, so we was full as conspickyeous as we cared about bein considerin the sort we had to be conspickyeous to. But of course that's just as you happen to hit the track when you start out; you cant tellergraph and range folks if you was Nellie Grant or Minnie Sherman themselves.

"We kep on up in the afternoon train to North Sudley and round home next day with a hired team threw Hawksberry. It want a great deal of a journey, and you wouldent think we could of spent ten dollars, but we did, and that was as fur as we anyways calcerlated to go. I told Hollis it was right round in a ring, and he said yes, but twas a weddin ring, and that made all the difference, and so it did. Besides, thare was Sunday and the pearin out left to think of. I did have a green silk after all, but it was on the ollive shade, and that is more genteel, I guess youll say. And the gloves are a perfick match. I had to get an extry fethear, which is pecock, to change in my hat to wear with it, but you dont ushilly get married but once in this world, and if you cant have an extry fethear then I dont see as you can ever rashonally expect to anywhere.

"Hollis looked real nice and stilysh, and if it hadent been for two things I should have been satisfied. But then you aint to be satisfied in this life I suppose, and the set times for it are dreadful short and uncertin about makin their connecsions with the times in general. One thing was, Ive alwers said in my own mind that Fellaiden folks wouldent ever see me figger-in off with Hollis Bassett on them church steps onless twas once for all as Missis Bassett. And lo and behold thare want scursely a soul thare to know when I did figger. It was a windy day and too thare might have been some spite in it. But anyway, the girls that used to stand round fast enough had all gone in when we got thare, and when we came out they staid in to see the minister's sister that had just come of all times in the world for that pertickler Sunday. Shes a perfick bewty, and she had on a black silk and a cream-colored ribbin with a brown edge to it on her bunnet, and one long cream-colored rosebud and one crimson one droppin out of the knott of it with limber stems and green leaves, that looked just

picked, and some kind of a soft shawl with every kind of a soft shady collor in it, and a face that thare was no use in anybody else pearin out the same six months with, and that was the other thing. And I told Hollis ridin home that it was no use, as long as the sun went round the world for everybody, tryin to make a pertickler day for yourself. It had to jibe on to everybody elses day after all. For my part I was thankful the pertickler one was over now and wed come to settle down to everyday. To that he said every day was pertickler enough for him now, and he was thankful for every pertickler day, and that was jest what he set out to be, and expected to keep on bein, which I thought was pearin out bright and kind for Hollis whatever else made a shine or diddent. And I recklected what you said that day about walkin pride in your heart. But I had to hector him a little too jest because I *was* so pleased. Every day on the farm, for stiddy work you know Hollis, and keepin round sharp after Uncle Amb and Mother Pemble, and carryin Careline on our backs. And says Hollis, what if weve gone and tied ourselves down to East Holler, and shes all certin true after all, and got to be waited on incessunt, and Deacon Amb *dooes* live on till hes ninety-nine and a week? *What if!* says I. What if — the cow should eat up the grinston? which no mortal cow ever did yet, all in one peace at any rate.

"Ive told you all my nuse now. Thare may be more some time. If you want me to and say so, Ill let you know as the times comes round.

"So I remain youres affecksionetly,

"SARAH ELLA BASSETT."

France told Phil, whom she saw often now, about Mrs. Bassett's letter, and received in return, as she had a subtle sense she should do, his last news from Fellaiden. Mrs. Fargood wrote quite full of news; of the "'pearin' out," and how well the bride had looked in her olive green; quite shy and modest, too, without any seeming as if she thought she was the whole churchgoing that day, — psalm, sermon, and benediction, — as most brides did. If Sarell could have known that her quench-

ing was but lighting her up! But one sees that the grace of our quenchings is just that we can't know.

The doctor's wife told also of Miss Kingsworth's coming, and that she was going to make her home with her brother, and that it was brightening him up wonderfully. "Though if you can't tell what a day may bring forth about one thing more certainly than another," the good woman added, "it 's about a girl as pretty as that making a settled home anywhere for anybody but a husband. She has come right into the works, had a class in Sunday-school the first Sunday, and rode round all day Monday with Mr. Kingsworth making parish calls, not waiting for the folks to come and see her, which I call friendly and clever, whether it 's genteel or not. I guess she means exactly *not* to be genteel, or give anybody time to set her off separate. Mr. Kingsworth has begun with his librery. He 's taken the old schoolhouse for it, and put in Hiram Goodsum for librarian and carrier. The selectmen think well of it, and it 's thought that next town-meeting there 'll be a vote carried to appropriate something, and make it a town affair, and pay Hiram some salary. There 's nothing starts up a town like having some man start up in it with a shoulder for every good wheel. And as Mr. Kingsworth says, he may n't live, or always be here, and a town ought to adopt whatever is worth while for it, and make sure of its being carried along. Sounds well for him, when he 's put in five hundred dollars to it, to start off with. It 'll run on that for some time. But Fellaiden's mighty tickled to get a town library just by voting it in and agreeing to raise not less than fifty dollars a year for it for the next five years. Hiram is in his element. He was always hankering wild after books, and now he 's turned in to pasture in a ten-acre mowing. Mr. Kingsworth and Miss Leonora and Israel Heybrook have been up there two days, ranging the books, and now they 're making out the catalogue."

After this, the letter passed to items of sickness and health, of household doings and changes, of fall butter sales and thanksgiving turkeys, and ceased to be interesting.

France walked up the hill from the train, in which she had met young Merriweather, wondering what had made her so

vaguely uncomfortable. The next day she went into town again, on purpose to call on Miss Ammah at the Berkeley.

Miss Ammah did not comfort her the least bit in the world, somehow, although she did not know what definite comfort she was looking for, or that she needed any.

"People find their places; and there 's always a like for a like," Miss Ammah said. "The good Lord does n't leave any of us to quite starve out. There 's always manna, and sometimes quails, in every desert. I 'm glad they 're going to have such a nice winter up there."

"Up there" seemed poles away from where France found herself, set back in her old surroundings, with all outward hold and tie broken from that one chance placing and relation of the short summer. She had not realized how this would be.

And yet the trains ran every day their four hours' trip up toward the hills, and the Creddles Mills stage and the farmers' wagons, went back and forth between there and Fellaiden. The depots, "Maine, Eastern, Fitchburg," stared her in the face from under the roofs of the gay street-cars, as she went up and down among the shops. There was a straight line enough; but what was ever going to take her over it again, or bring anybody down from thence?

Miss Ammah said something about her house. "I may have to run up there before spring," she told the girl. And that was simply a fine exasperation, — as fine as the prick of a cambric needle upon a fresh-smarting surface.

France sat perfectly silent, thinking of the snows upon the long slopes, that she had so wanted to see; and of the glitter of great icy tree-tops in the climbing sun.

Miss Ammah glanced at her furtively, and cruelly changed the subject, upon which, after the smallest decent interval, France Everidge rose and went away.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOBGOBLINS.

Sarell was setting up her empire at East Hollow.

She was fully instated now as housewife. She and Hollis had the little end room beyond the buttery, and the sloping corner attic over it in the long roof. The kitchen itself passed under her sole regulation, and in this she worked changes with a free hand, bringing it to an expression of herself which was far enough from any look it had worn in Care'line's nominal rule.

"If I 'm to content myself down and *stay*," she said, "I must fix matters to look like it. There 's certin things I must do *somewheres*, you see, or I might as well be Sarell Gately, chorin' round, as Missis Bassett." And Care'line passively assented to whatever did not disturb her and her rocking-chair.

"Git me a pot o' Venishian red," Sarell said to Hollis, "an' some vermilyun."

The tall dresser-shelves, that reared up in homely stateliness from table beneath to ceiling above, soon took on, under her touch, a warm, heavy tint; and the sparkling tins made fine array against the dull, deep color. The chimney-bricks, back of the lustrous stove, and up under the high brown mantel, were put in corresponding hue; and the broad hearth beneath glowed with scarlet, freshly laid on, from week to week in whatever touches were needed, with the vermilion powder, mixed in milk and molasses, that made it shine as with a varnish.

The splint-bottomed armchair, with its tall-barred back, was also in vermilion, properly prepared as paint, with oil and turpentine; and this stood back so that the dark shade of the dresser threw out the lines in cheerful relief. The floor was already of the solid, time-honored, deep yellow. Sarell was

artistic without knowing it. If she had come down to Boston and its neighborhoods at this time, where one touch of paint-pot made the whole world kin, she would have found that she had put herself in precisely the last reach and demonstration of refinement, where at the primitive point in the cycle of the color-passion, savagery and study meet.

She sat down beatified, in her first completed splendors.

"You don' know," she said, "the comfort them red shelves is, every time I look at 'em."

Hollis looked at the bright cheeks and the blue shine of the eyes and the toss of the deep gold hair, and satisfied *his* eyes also as to the harmonies of the original principles of refracted lights.

"Y' don't half see," said Sarell taking in herself every detail, knowing, like any artist, where every touch had been and why, and avaricious that her public should discern it in particular also.

"Yes, I do," said Hollis, sending his eyes round vaguely, and snatching them back again to her face. "The desert 's beginnin' t' blossom, an' t' smile."

"Out of one corner of its mouth," said Sarell. "But it 's *our* corner. Order reigns — in *that* much of Warsaw." Not knowing anything about Warsaw, or the order, or how or why or when it reigned.

"*Never* rains, with you, but it pours, Sarell," said Hollis, his look following her as she shot across to the dresser to arrange more exactly the interval of space between two gleaming tin coffee-pots, and slant their noses and handles more precisely parallel. "I can't see as you 've left a blessed thing to do anywheres."

"No; nor you won't see it any more. That 's the eyesight of a man. Things 'll shine all winter, that 's all you 'll know; an' you 'll persume they 've kep' on."

"All I want 's t' hev things keep on," said the satisfied Benedict; and I think a little spiritual glimpse of what wifehood, and the moral shining, in a man's eyesight, has to be for a woman, came to Sarell at the moment. "A tug an' a scrub, an' t' hev it look as ef it come so, an' kep'. Well, I 've set out

for 't, an' please the Lord, I 'll see it thriew. 'Walkin' pride in your heart,' — it 's a good go-by," she said to herself.

This was November. The snow kept off late this year, and they were having beautiful weather, — beautiful for the husking, and the getting in of the roots, and for the chopping of the firewood out in the open chip-yard. While Sarell put on her gay winter colors in the kitchen, adorning with substantial brightness her own especial and clear domain, and even straightening and freshening here and there about the fixed Care'line in the keeping-room, Hollis heaped up the golden treasury of the corn-barns, and split and piled great walls of hearty oak and beech and maple and fat pine in the long shed-room; leaving the huge, knotty maple "chunks" in grand supply for holding the long fires, twenty-four hours round, in the capacious keeping-room stove and in Mother Pemble's bedroom.

Mother Pemble heard the busy strokes, and the flying of the meteoric chips out there before her north window; and of course she smelled the paint; and with acute ears and nose, and questioning tongue, she kept the run of all the regular work and most of the innovating improvements.

"So the ol' dresser 's done over niew," she said; "an' the big cheer, you told me, an' what else? Seems to me it 's wonderful times; 'turrible times in the Jarseys,'" she quoted, from the old Revolutionary sayings passed on into home by-words and handed down to the second and third generations. "I don't see," she added, one day, "what need ther' was, though, fer all them niew —" and there she suddenly stopped.

"Niew what?" Sarell demanded as suddenly, stopping with something in her hand at the door.

"Land knows what!" the old lady answered, vaguely and pettishly; but the tone of her beginning had been quite to some specific purpose. "Tinkerin' an' hammerin'! night an' day, p'utty near. Kivers or curtins or carpits or all three, I persume! I ain't let into everything, layin' here."

Which Sarell had been quite carefully aware of, and especially as to the putting up of the fresh, cheap blue Holland shades to the three keeping-room windows, in place of the old, curled, crackled, dusty paper ones. Care'line herself had said,

regarding the unusual expenditure, "It 'll be just as well, I guess, not to name it to ma."

"I ketch a word now an' agin, ef I *can't* git it out dereck. Measurins an' rus'lins, too, an' steppins up an' down. Y' need n't think I 'm deef or a fool. I c'n place things. I know the ol' terrortory by heart."

Sarell never answered a syllable. But she told Hollis that night, in a whisper, in the far privacy of their own apartment, that "if the house got afire before mornin' he 'd have to look out for the old lady. F'r I 've tied up the knob of the door to the handle of the press clussit," she continued, when he did not at first respond.

"What 's that fur?" Hollis then naturally inquired.

"T' keep the cat out o' the clussit," his wife replied.

Next morning, bright and early, Sarell softly loosed the cord and put it in her pocket. An hour after, when she took in Mother Pemble's breakfast, the two women gave each the other one sharp glance, which had not the movement of an eyelid in it, nor was the fortieth part of a second long, and which each barely detected in the other, thinking her own bearing to be scrupulously and precisely as in common. But the one knew that she was watched, and the other was satisfied with her experiment.

It was scarcely a week after that, when Dr. Fargood stopped his sulky out by the fence when Hollis was chopping in the chip-yard.

"Fine morning," he said. "Where 's your big dog?"

"Big doarg? Hain't got any. A *big doarg!*" he repeated, laughing between and after the emphasized syllables, with that ejaculatory merriment which takes the articulation of amazed disdain. "Don't you know the deacon better 'n that, doctor?" and with that he lowered his voice, left his axe sticking in the maple chunk, and came to the fence, out of earshot from Mother Pemble's north window. "He would n't keep a *doarg* three inches long, f'r fear as much as two of 'em would be stomach!"

"Well, I thought," said the doctor, twinkling, and shaking his shoulders, "that it could n't exactly pay in any capacity *as* a dog, though I did n't know what else it could be. It did n't

seem to have any bark. It sat up straight on the doorstone there, as I drove up sharp from the Corner, and before I got near enough to make it fairly out, or it me, it dropped down on all fours and sneaked off behind the porch and the jog of the house. It puzzled me a good deal. It could n't have been a calf or a cosset; for neither of those animals sits on its haunches that I know of; and I 'm pretty sure it was n't a bear."

"What 'r ye talkin' about, doctor? When was it all? What d' ye mean?" asked Hollis, bewildered; for the doctor was a man of fun as much as of physic.

"It was night before last; past one in the morning, yesterday, rather. I was coming round to the Centre this way, and turned off up here from the meadow road. Pleasant night, too. Wonderful weather for this time of year!"

But Hollis was not attending to the last words. "On the doorstun?" he said, putting his foot up on the fence-bar, and scratching his head, with his elbow on his knee for a purchase. "I 'm clear catterwampussed!"

The doctor laughed. "Things look queer in the night," he said. "I see a good many hobgoblins. That was the last one."

Hollis's hat, displaced by his knuckles, tilted down over his forehead. He stood upright and shook it on again, as the doctor's sulky rattled away, beyond the reach of further word. Doctors learn a surprising art of taking themselves off.

Hollis went in to his wife, leaving the axe sticking in the maple.

Sarell was trying out soap-grease, and the fat smoke choked him.

"Ugh, ugh, ugh! What d' ye think Doctor Fargood says, Sarell? Thought we kep' a *big doarg* down here. Ha! ugh! A doarg without any bark to him — Ugh! how that fat seffercates a feller! See him sett'n up straight in the middle o' the night out on the —"

Sarell thrust the dripping-spoon out at him in mid-air, with a gesture of imperative command. "Hush up!" she half whispered, half signalled, with emphatic flash and set of white

teeth and widening and closure of red lips, her brow knitting, and her head giving a little spasmodic shake.

"Psha! Nonsense!" she said aloud. "There, you 're jest in time t' lift that kittle off."

With that, and accompanying pantomime, she got him into the shed-room, and shut the door. "Hollis Bassett," she said, "you 're as innersunt as a baa-lamb. An' I like you *fur* it. Only it won't do to bla' at *any*thing in *this* house. Don't you so much as tell me the wind 's east, athout lookin' to see first that the doorcrack 's close. What *is it* about the dog on the doorstone?"

And then Hollis, much as if he had been warned of nitro-glycerine, and then set to handing along mysterious vessels, gave forth his words, divested of all natural impulse, in a scared, careful way.

Sarell listened, with the air of taking in circumstantial evidence. "All right!" she said at the end. "Now we 'll drop the subject. An' don't ever pick it up agin, Hollis, with the doctor nor nobody else; not even me, 'less more comes of it. An' if I should be took bad with a toothache in the night, or, in meetin', say, some Sunday, an' hev t' come out in sermon-time, don't you take no notice, nor git a mite anxious. 'T won't be nes'cery, an' — wait a minute!"

She left him, and disappeared through the keeping-room; looked in at Mother Pemble's door, which she found unlatched, and inquired hastily of that lady if she had seen anything of the deacon; then returning, "Now," she said to Hollis, "jest step round that way and lock the parlor-porch door on the outside, and fetch the key to me, will ye?"

"What fur?" asked Hollis, as if that form of words were invariably effectual of its purpose.

"To keep the dog off the doorstone," Sarell replied, relevantly and concisely.

Hollis accepted the statement, or what it covered, and his errand, in which he showed — and Sarell appreciated it — not obtuseness and abjectness, but brightness and a generous sweetness. It is oftener the fact with the henpecked than the peckers are aware. As he passed out of the shed-place and around

the house outside, Sarell made her way again to Mother Pemble's room, where she began to rummage in a cupboard.

The old woman, sitting up against her pillows, knitting-work in hand, glowered at her over her spectacles. "What now?" she demanded.

"Care'line's pressboard, — the narrer one," returned Sarell, knocking the door with her elbow back against the wainscot, and sending a tack-hammer clattering down from the shelves. "An' 't ain't here, neither; not as I see." She shoved things back and forth a minute longer, replaced the iron hammer, with a drop of its claw end upon the hollow-sounding board, and closed the door with a small slam to fasten the slip-latch.

Mother Pemble scrutinized her deliberately through all these movements. "What 's goin' on in this house, for all that racket to kiver up, I wanter know?" she said. "I c'n see thriew a millstone, Sarell Bassett!"

"Pertickler ly when the millstone ain't there," replied Sarell, calm with the consciousness of one suspected in quite a wrong direction. She picked up a bit of patchwork, as she spoke, that had fallen out of a basket in the cupboard, and, opening the little door again, returned it to its place. "We c'n all do that, Mis' Pemble; or when," she added, irresistibly impelled, "the millstone 's s' near home 't we c'n put our eye t' the shaft-hole athout reachin' or strainin'. Only, in that case, Mis' Pemble, ef ther 's anything grindin' we must look out fer our noses!"

"Y' need n't Mis' Pemble me more 'n 's perfectly comf'table 'n c'nvenient, Mis' Bassett," returned the old lady, resuming her knitting-work, and speaking with external imperturbability, her eyes still directed slantwise at Sarell over her glasses. "An' y' need n't take *me* in hand, no way. *I* ain't a fool, as I 've observed t' you afore. You 've got *Hollis* t' look after, an' that 's enough, though 't won't be, by a half a dozen o' the same sort yet, I 'll ventur t' say!"

Mrs. Bassett turned round, and faced the sidewise look squarely. She held her eyes stone-still upon it, even as it withdrew and dropped, with all her might for about ten seconds.

"Miss-es Pemble," then she said, in a slow, strong monotone, that had such a tempest in it as low, long horizon thunder has, "ef you was *up*, I b'lieve my heart I sh'd knock you down!"

"'T ain't wuth while, Sarell," remarked Hollis, with quiet drawl, from the other side the open door, whither he had come round in pursuit of her through the keeping-room. "I notice, commonly, that when a person needs knocking down they *air* down. Jess let 'em stay."

The husband and wife went off together.

Care'line sat in the keeping-room by the big table, on the side next the passage to her mother's door, — her usual place, within hearing. Her feet were up in a chair; her lap was full of woollen rags that she was cutting for Mrs. Pemble's rugwork. Quite incapable of any stir in her own nature, she looked with simple wonder upon other people's "breezes."

"You ought n't to mind ma, Sarell," she said, with that slow, open-mouthed dwelling of hers upon the vowels, as the young woman addressed passed through beside her, with a red spot on either cheek, and her eyes still intense. "She 's an old lady, an' you 've alwers hed sech a real good-natured dispersishin."

"You *could* spile the temper of a flat-iron, ef you kep' it on the coals the clear durin' time," Sarell returned, going straight on into her kitchen.

Moved by a mild sense of some anxiety that might come, Care'line, an hour later, carrying in a basket full of her cut rags to Mrs. Pemble, said smoothly, "I don't think, ma, Sarell means anything by her talk, an' I would n't notice if I was you. She 's a real good care-taker, but then she 's spunky, too; an' 't would be bad now, you see, if she and Hollis was to take affront. There warn't the least thing done in the house that you mistrusted. What *could* be done, with me settin' there, you know?"

"*You?* Anything!" answered the old woman. "'Z long 's they did n't tumble over ye."

When Mother Pemble was spiteful to Care'line it had certainly come to the last point with her. She felt it so herself; the very "revvet," as she sometimes said of things, "was out." What was there for her to hold together for, except her love — such as love was with her — for her daughter?

When Care'line went comfortably and composedly from the room, "taking no notice," and too phlegmatic to take anything

to heart, the old woman dropped her arms lengthwise upon the bedclothes, as if in some vital point in her body between them the rivet *had* fallen out, turned her face away upon the pillow, and let two grieving tears run slowly out of her eyes, under her spectacles, upon her cheeks.

But she was all alone. Nobody knew that Mother Pemble ever cried — even those two tears.

Was it a thing defiant of and utterly contradictory to those two tears, or was it in some subtile connection with their spring, that, fifteen minutes afterward, Mother Pemble's latch was down, and she, with a smooth, hard face, was sitting more upright against her pillows than before, doing that curious, slow work with her thin, flat file and the bit of steel at whose ridged end she rasped so steadily back and forth, back and forth?

One stormy evening later, in what the young wife called the "new-married end of the house," another bit of talk arose, in this wise.

A bright fire burned in the round, oven-like fireplace of the buttery room. Sarell sat with her feet comfortably tilted against the raised edge of the brick hearth, whereon Hollis had drawn forth a goodly heap of live coals, and over them was popping out little golden nuggets of corn into white roses.

"Do you believe in witches, or fetches, Sarell?" he asked, suddenly.

"When I see 'em," Sarell answered, in a safe ambiguity.

"Well, that 's it. Do you believe it *is* 'em, if you *do* see 'em? Ther 's curious things enough — "

"We all know that," interrupted Sarell. "Where folks stop, in most kinds o' b'lievin' is where you put the name to it. Why?"

"Because, sittin' here, an' what Dr. Fargood said, puts me in mind of a circumstaance."

"Well?"

"It was last summer when we was gittin' in hay from the overhill piece. We men-folks were all out there, an' Elviry an' Mrs. Newell was gone t' the S'ciety. 'Bout an hour b'fore sundown the Deac'n he kinder stops an' pushes up his hat an'

looks round f'r a rest, an' he sees ol' Poke-ahontas, spite of her poke, sidlin' with her long horns at the pastur' bars lead'n' into the oat-field. All the rest of the drove was at her heels. 'Hurry up, Hollis, after them cattle!' he says sharp. So I started 'n headed 'em off, 'n fixed the bars, 'n turned 'em down along the brook to'ads home. When I see 'em safe 's fur 's the bridge, I came up over the knoll, where the woodchucks' holes is. An' ef I did n't see three of 'em, settin' up prim as dishes, 'longside o' their front doors. I could n't stand that, so I came on home to get a trap. An' the minute I got my head over the gardin-ridge, I took notice that the high door, out o' this room, where the ol' steps was, was swung open; an' on the sill, with her feet danglin', was a woman in a ashy-colored gown an' a black hank'chef over her head, eatin' by the handful out of a berry-basket. 'F 't wa'nt Betsey Bushell, I donno what it was. But when I 'd come out through the sweet corn an' looked agin, d' y' b'lieve that door was clapped to, an' no kind o' a livin' bein' visible? I come right across the wall, an' in at the shed, and through the house, and round it all sides; an' neither up the road nor down, nor cross the fields, in all outdoors, was sign or track of anybody. I alwus thought 't was mighty singler; an' Betsey Bushell's house 's ben shut up, an' she lost sight of most ever sence."

Sarell had listened intently. "You did n't mention it?" she asked, with point.

"Well, no. I hurried an' set my trap, an' then back to drive up the hay load, an' — I did n't think 't was worth while."

"No more 't was n't. Did y' ketch y'r woodchuck?" Her manner was light again.

"Yes, two of 'em. But what d' you make out 'bout Betsey Bushell?"

"I don't make out. Mebbe 't 'll make itself out — *ef its well let alone.* Out-doors is a big place, though. The' might be such a thing 's a needle in a haystack; but ef I was in a hurry for it I don't persume I should go *fust* to the haystack."

When Sarell turned oracular, and prescribed letting alone, the subject ended. Hollis assumed upon his check a voluntary

air, as if he saw he had given her as much to think of as was well at once, poured the last of the white roses out of the popper, and laid the oracle away in his mind. There was more witch-work about women than this woman was ever likely to help him fathom.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SHOWS AND DISQUIETS.

Mrs. Fargood was very proud of Flip Merriweather's letters. She had no children, and this young brother represented for her all that other matrons were ambitious of and jealous for in their sons. From the time he was ten years old, and used to come and stay with her in the long winters, up through his "schooling" days, and of late in the vexing uncertainty and impatience as to what his manhood should be and take hold of, — sometimes elated that he could do anything he *would* take hold of, and sometimes provoked and annoyed that he was in no hurry himself for aught except squirrels and partridges and pickerel, and river and mountain rambling, — she had made his development and disposal, as women will, her own continual concern of mind and plan of effort, hardly remembering that either he or Providence had also anything to say about it.

"Why can't you be like those Heybrooks?" she used to ask him, when he was a little boy, and afterward, when he was growing bigger. Until one day he answered her conclusively, "Sister! if you have n't found out yet that I *ain't* those Heybrooks and can't be made *into* those Heybrooks, I might just as well tell you so as to let you keep on hammerin'. And as long as you pound, I sha'n't get into *any* shape, *theirn* nor mine!"

"'*Theirs*,' Flip," corrected Hannah Louisa meekly, recognizing, as women have to do, the masculine positivity, when it asserts itself, with whatever waywardness.

Nevertheless, she was always secretly and restlessly comparing; making a point, all the while, and for the very cause, of airing Flip's best sayings and doings in Mother Heybrook's ears, in talks at the sewing-circle, and calls at the farm.

And Mother Heybrook — not advertising at all her boys'

superiority, of which her consciousness had grown so calm and prevailing a great while since as to have been beyond the triumph of mere instances — would say, with her gentle concession, too kind to be satisfying, "Flip 's a smart boy, yes. Ef he only gits started right, I don't doubt his doin' well."

One surprised and admiring "Well *done!*" from the successful mother's lips or eyes was Hannah Louisa's most fervent ambition.

So she came often to the farm this winter, when the afternoons were turning rosy with the low light along the snows, bringing her knitting-work and Philip's last communications; and sometimes, — often, — Israel Heybrook, seeing the doctor's sleigh come winding along through the bit of plain into the Clark Hollow, would be with his mother in the warm, pleasant keeping-room when the visitor and her budget arrived.

One day, therefore, he had listened to these paragraphs: —

"Tell about *weddings*, Hannah Louisa! I rather think you 'd just like to have been in the big Church of the Epiphany the other night. There was a showing to the Gentiles that the meeting-house was n't ever named for. Only there were n't many Gentiles let in.

"In the first place, there was a carpet and an awning all the way from the great doors down the steps and across the sidewalk; and policemen each side to keep off the crowd. Then inside it was all blazing with lights, and the front of the chancel, that 's the railed end, you know, where the minister does his part of the business, and the steps up to it, were full of plants in bloom, and heaps of flowers, such as you 'd say never *did* bloom out of the Garden of Eden. And there were eight fellows in such get-ups as come to pass only a long way down from Adam and the fig-leaves, and white favors of flowers and ribbons on their coat-lappets, travelling back and forth in the broad aisle at the allotment, I should say, of five or six miles apiece in the whole job, first and last, — handing people into their seats.

"People! there ought to be some other word for it, when a crowd is like that. Velvet and satin and jewelry, and feathers and flowers and lace, and ribbons and trinkets of fans and

things, and bouquets, and hair! and smilings and noddings and rustlings and whisperings and leanings this way and that, — it was a kind of live ocean of gorgeousness with the spirit of 'all-this-is-us' moving about on the face of it. And a little, low music playing on the organ all the time.

"Then at last the organ hushed up, and so did the whispers, but there was more rustling than ever, because every head was turning round. And the ushers — those were the eight fellows — were all down at the doors, that were wide open. And presently the organ started off with the big Wedding March, and the eight fellows came up two and two through the aisle again, and stood round, scattering, each side of the chancel, among the flowers, and behind them came the bride's mother with the bridegroom; and after them the bride's father with the bride, and now I 'll mention that they were Mr. and Mrs. George H. Everidge, and Miss Euphemia Everidge and a Mr. Sampson Kaynard, who has n't got much Sampson about him, I guess, except his name, and maybe the same kind of a jaw-bone belonging to him.

"Of course I don't dare to stop without telling you what the bride had on. She was dressed in white satin, with velvet borderings and a kind of workery of silver flowers; and the rest of the stuff that she could n't get on filled up the aisle behind her, like a drift of snow along Thumble's sides, just frozen over and shiny, and edged off with some that was new-fallen and all full of little icy sparkles, so that when she knelt down to be married, she was a clear heap of snow and frosty flowers and white veil like a fog, and just her face and the edges of her hair, and one hand with a great round bunch of real white lilies in it, to make her out by. I should say it was enough to scare a fellow to swear up to such a panorama of a woman as that!

"But they came down the aisle presently, a good deal as if nothing particular had happened to them since they went up. And then the ushers began handing the people out again. The family first, like mourners. I forgot to say that four of them had led in the four sisters last of all before they went down the middle and up again to fetch the bridal party. And the prettiest sight of the whole, to my mind, was our Miss France, in a

dress just the color of a blush rose, and not too much of it, but sort of folded round her as a bud folds itself up, and her face looking real sweet and not a bit proud. Not even so proud as it used to look sometimes at Fellaiden. When *she* came out again, her eyes were wet and her lips trembled.

"It was Oliver Bannian that took her, — both times. He is one of the big Bannians out at Oldwood. There 's lots of them. Oldwood 's all Bannians, and they 've got no end of money amongst them. Just buy up the biggest thing that 's going and make it bigger. They say Oliver 's after France, but *that* don't make out anything. There 's a dozen more that 's that. He was round her all that evening, anyway. I was at the reception, with the Miss Pyes. That was France's doing too, for clerks and shippers don't count in those lots usually.

"I can't tell you any more about it; it 's too long a story. I stepped about amongst the extra drygoods piled round on the floors, and heard a lot of trash talked, and just one thing that was worth while to remember or say over, and that *was*. Miss France said it to Mr. Oliver Bannian.

"'You 'll miss your sister,' says he, just making talk, and eating ice-cream as fast as he could swallow. 'Specially out of that awfully jolly, little evening room of yours.'

"She looked back quick at him, as if he had called her away from something else that she was thinking of. 'I don't think I miss people,' she said in that clear, even way of hers, with a kind of bell-note to her voice. 'What they *are* to me is always there.'

"They say the old man has given Mrs. Kaynard twenty thousand right out, and she had five thousand dollars' worth of presents.

"That 's all about that.

"Tell Sam Baxter he 'd better stay where he is, unless he 'll come along with his axe and his overalls, and do down here the thing he can do first-rate up there. I know a man will give him one-fifty a cord for chopping and piling, and Sam can do three cords a day. It takes something that a fellow can do with his two hands, and then for him to take hold and do it, and beat every time, to make a place nowadays. You can't *get*

places. Folks here ain't crying for country bone and sinew to come and grab their soft business. There 's a crowd of chaps now, standing in platoons, miles deep, round the cities, all educated and dressed up ahead of their chances, with their hands in their pockets, waiting for the professions and the banks and the railroad companies and the rings in trade and stocks and the old, settled firms to cry out for 'em. But they don't do it. The sides are all made up, and the game 's in the middle. Daniel Webster said there was 'room enough at the top.' There is n't now. And there was n't for him, before he got through. Things are top-heavy. The country has manufactured more Presidents than it will ever have any use for.

"I suppose Sam will say I talk smart now I 've got what I wanted myself. But I can tell him it 's a long look ahead, and through the woods, yet. And I should n't have got *it* if I had n't known just one little thing of my own better than most folks. I knew how to catch a pickerel."

Israel sat through all this to the end, notwithstanding that he had a great impulse to rise up and escape from it in the middle. When he had heard it, he found that it all had some point of meaning for himself; and when finally he did get up with his sober quietness, and say to his mother, "I 'm going up to East Centre, mother; anything to send or say?" he went away with three things to think of besides his own direct business and Mrs. Heybrook's little errand.

First, — His own plan and ambition in life, that had been turned back upon him here, and that still, spite of his noble way of taking the alternative, and making noble work of it, would now and then lift itself out of that shadowy "might have been," insisting upon fresh comparison, and reiteration of the judgment and motive that had kept it down.

Flip Merriweather was right: there were more men educated for top places now than there were top places to fill. He might never have worked into such professional life as would have satisfied him. He would not have stood in those platoons with his hands in his pockets. He should have come back to the farm, very likely, any way, But the dear knowledge that he wanted! If he could have had full time for that.

To have made himself a little more equal with the best, and then to have put the best, if need be, into his plain work, through which it would come to whatever there was for it, though the game out there, for the dollar-and-cent chances, were all made up! And Lyman, too, — the boy who had a gift of his own, that he could follow better than most, and for which there was place enough wherever men and women bore the burden and suffering of the body.

It was wrong, somehow, that made any real hindrance.

It was wrong and greed, down there among the cities, that kept any real power from finding honest room to work in, in this world of powers meant to unfold into things its poor, selfish human economies had not conceived of.

So he turned the old problem over in his mind, a matter partly put by and done with for himself, but present and pressing, pressing down and hard, on others.

Above all this rose the fresh vision of France Everidge.

"What people *are* to me is always there," she had said. There were both sweetness and sting for him in that. She was his friend; she knew that he was hers. They had promised each other that. He knew it would stand; that what he was to her was there. But only her friend. She had taken such care of that.

And she did not "miss" people. She was satisfied, in this faith of hers, that where she left them, there she could find them, and take them up again. Perhaps that was how a woman is different in her friendships from a man. Or can a woman have a friendship beyond where, to a man, it remains possible? He missed *her;* he wanted her, — her, of all the world; *not* "there," but here!

Was he to put by this also?

Was it not by, far by, already? She, among those grand, luxurious people, that Phil said shrewdly ought not to be called by the name of the mass at all; "dozens after her" who could deck and surround her and shut her off like this: was not she gone by from him, like all the rest of it? She? It was no longer she alone, as she had been here in the sweet hills, separated from her splendor and her obligation. People who could marry

their daughters like *that*, — what could he ever have to ask of them? He had been a fool.

Graver, severer in its gravity, than usual, his face was, as he went through with Mr. Kingsworth presently some parish plans and lists; even as he talked with Leonora about the new Monday evening class, for the foreign tour with the stereopticon, and the great sleigh that was to go round and pick up such as had n't their own ways for coming.

"We are going to make it so gradual and real," Miss Kingsworth said. "We are to have two evenings of sailing and seafaring and arrival scenes; there is one of icebergs, and one of a storm, and one of a lovely great ocean sunset; and then there are the Irish headlands, and the Channel pictures, and the going up the Mersey. It won't be much faster than Cook, and not half so confusing. Only one of these days they will all find themselves talking about 'when we were in Scotland,' and 'when we went down through Warwickshire,' and 'the night we arrived in Paris.' Those lighted bridges and quays, and the boulevards and the shops, are just the very identities themselves. Bernard — but does your head ache, Mr. Heybrook?" she broke off to ask suddenly, with the sweetest directness and simplicity.

Then Israel smiled as he thanked her, and assured her not; but she saw some sort of weariness or ache in the smile, and wondered if he had n't something he would like to say to Bernard; so she was gone, presently, out of the room, without having made any least little demonstration of her going.

"What is it, Rael?" his friend asked then.

"Only the 'vain show' of things," returned Israel, with the same slow smile. "I feel sometimes as if we only got the pictures of living."

"I am learning to be thankful for the pictures," Bernard said. "It is a thing one has to learn. But I think I know that my Father *shows* me nothing except what He has in his mind to *give* me, sometime. Not in the mere first shape, perhaps, in which He has to make me see it; but in what Leo calls the 'identity.' 'Then I shall be satisfied, when I shall *awake* in His likeness.' When I get my full consciousness, and find that

it is in the verity of that of which He has given me the image."

"I believe you do feel so, Mr. Kingsworth. And I believe you have the right."

"You have the same, Rael."

Rael was silent.

"It is the right of the thirsty."

"We are all that, I suppose."

"Yes. And so the pledge is to all, — 'Let him that is athirst come.' 'Every one that thirsteth, without money, and without price.' So that one has no *right*, over another. 'Whosoever will, let him come, and drink of the water of life freely.'"

"But that *is* the water of life, — spiritual life, I suppose."

"What else has life but the spirit? It is just whatever we are thirsty for, in these souls that love and question, and want to have and know. It is our satisfying; it is what meets the need we are suffering from, the present experience of the spirit. It is a real thing; it is only set in an image so far as that which has the keenest bodily likeness to it is chosen for a sign to us of how perfect the satisfying shall be, — the satisfying the thirst is given for."

"But it is not earthly; it is righteousness."

"Is n't that what you are craving for? That things should be made right with you? You have got a certain way beyond any wish for good that cannot come righteously? You would not lift your hand to take a thing, though you wanted it ever so much, that it would not be honest to take?"

"No," said Rael. "I want nothing that does not belong to me. But what does, I do want."

"Exactly. And to know righteously what it is. That is what God means to show us, and then give."

"Not in this world's things."

"In everything that begins in this world and reaches on out of it. Don't separate God's righteousnesses; and don't try to separate soul from its own body that He giveth it. He will not take away any single *right* good from you to give you any other. When you come to think so about all, not to want

what you cannot honestly, according to perfect honors and values, in the 'measure of an angel,' have, then the Lord's prayer will be consummated in you, and the Will be done in the earthly things as, and because, it is done in the heavenly. There can be no mistake. It is the perfect Law of Righteousness."

"For the converted."

"When you turn to God's will, you are converted. He is converting us all the time. Not *away* from anything; but in and through the absolute whole of us, here and now, as well as then and there."

"And we see things, that would have been a whole life to us, go past us, and away from us. They *do* go, Mr. Kingsworth. You cannot say they don't."

Rael spoke with a hard tone, almost like a bitter challenge.

Bernard Kingsworth answered him in a voice that sounded out of a far, sweet calm, as strong as any bitter despair could be.

"They do go; and they — or what they foreshadowed — come again to us. Nothing comes *near* us, but on a divine and bountiful errand."

"I have wanted," said Rael, carried out of his reserve, as if he had been talking with a spirit, "what a man only wants once, with all there is of him, — and it is going by."

After Rael said this, there came a brief pause between them.

When Bernard spoke, it was with a tone just changed for the deeper, but none the less calm, none the less strong.

"I have gone through that, Rael. What I wanted, or thought I must have, has gone by; but neither of us knows what is waiting, coming, for him, or where. It is with the Desire that is greater for us than our own."

The two men held their hands out to each other; they met in a firm clasp. There was no more for two men to say: their confidences are not as the confidences of women.

Rael Heybrook took up his hat, and went away.

Bernard Kingsworth followed him to the outer door, and said good-night; then he came back to his study, and shut himself in, in the twilight.

He had not been passive all these months ; he had been questioning, discerning, quietly recollecting, many things.

He had not stayed away from Fellaiden simply because the girl was there who had hurriedly refused his first asking. She had involuntarily done more than that.

Now this was the plain other half to the problem. If it had never been certain before, it could not be otherwise now. Only — he could quite clearly see, in his honest courage to see — the two halves had failed, somehow, to join themselves.

Was that any responsibility, now it had been shown to him, of his?

Noblesse oblige.

There is something mightier than a born name, — there is a born soul and desire of nobleness. He had already acted upon it, when he had answered Rael Heybrook that he also had "wanted, with all that there was of him," and that his own wish had gone by. In that very moment, at last, it did utterly go by.

In that righteousness, in the heart of that perfect wish and will for him, whatever else there might be, it was made plain to him now that it was not "this thing, so dear, so sweet."

In just this giving of it, it might be for those other two, but not for him. And this righteousness was actually and vitally, as he had preached it, greater and dearer to him than selfish fulfilling. His "preaching and praying" were truly "the same word." He had never "made known" to his people what had not first and truly been "made known" between him and his Father.

Let the will be done, then. He was soul-valiant enough to hope, — to ask for it, — laying his own will and joy down at the feet of his Lord.

And we know that whoso layeth his life down there, taketh it again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DRIFT.

After Christmas, the Everidges moved into town.

They took a lovely furnished house in "Westmoreland," with four rooms and a conservatory on the first floor. The little parlor between the drawing-room and conservatory, blinded to daylight by a blank wall, but exquisite in the evening with gaslight and olive and old-gold furnishings in simple cloth, with a Steinway in the deep alcove that made the apartment L-shaped, and a stand of flowers, that never blossomed there, but was replenished every week from the florist's, filling up the introspective bay-window on the long side, was the young ladies' evening-room.

Now France set her face against this evening-room, just as she had done against the one in their house out of town, — only with more emphasis, inasmuch as city receptions were more extended and pronounced than the same sort of things in the country. She never sat there, except purely to oblige Helen; and she would not do that when only young men called, so that, as Helen said, what did her obliging amount to? Poor Helen was sadly discomfited by the spokes in her wheels that France's increasing oddities kept inserting. "If she *had n't* any sister!" she said. "But to go off and make a point of receiving alone, when France was out there in the library with papa and mamma, and when it was just exactly the good of there being two of them!"

But France said, "I don't like this separating of visits. Why should n't the girls want to talk with mamma? She is better company than any of us. And as to gentlemen, — I think it is simply vulgar to receive them by ourselves. As if so much

more were meant than there is, — or we were determined there should be!"

"Pray do drop the 'gentlemen,' France!" put in Mrs. Sampson Kaynard, who was taking tea with her sisters. "Nobody says it. The 'gentlemen' are all behind the small counters now, and the 'ladies' work at Fitzrinkle & Chorker's, and go out to their one o'clock apple-pie and coffee with rolls of music in their hands! There are only *men* in our set."

"I don't see why a lady should not work at Fitzrinkle & Chorker's, if she has occasion," said incorrigible France, ignoring the men.

"Exactly," returned Euphemia. "It is the rolls of music we object to; so we don't carry rolls of music any more. Enid Upperton had a two-page song sent home the other day. She said she would sooner carry a market-basket."

"What do you think France said to somebody the other night, who asked if he might call?"

"What did you say, France?" laughed Mrs. Kaynard, who did not wish to push too far into earnest, and who was rather proud of her sister's odd independence, and retailed a good many of her trenchant sayings where she chose herself to oppose, for her own convenience, some conventionality.

"O, you can laugh; you're well out of it," said Helen, with something as near sullenness as an elegant girl allows herself.

"France, nobody shall tell tales of you but yourself. What did you say?" persisted Euphemia.

"I suppose I know what she means. I told Mr. Ralph Maddison —"

"That handsome New-Yorker!"

"That we should be happy to see him. But I begged him to come early in the evening, for mamma kept early hours, and we did not like to disturb her ways."

"Which was the same," Helen remarked in a crushing tone, "as if she had said, 'and don't stay long; and don't imagine *we* care to see you on our own account.'"

"Ralph Maddison!" repeated Mrs. Kaynard.

"I knew you'd be shocked. That was why I didn't overwhelm you with the name at first. But that's the way she goes

on; and now she 's putting her back up at the notion of young dinner-parties."

"No," said France. "Only that there should n't be a dinner-party here, I thought, at which papa and mamma did not preside."

"France, they *all* do it," said Euphemia, with urgent assertion. "The Copseley Bannians are in town, and the girls have given two or three dinners of their own, already. Young Mrs. Bannian Chute is there, to be sure, and takes the lead; but they *never* have the old people."

"Do they take their dinner in the nursery, — the old people, I mean?" asked France, with simplicity.

"Pshaw! Don't try to run against all the world, France. There are always rooms enough. Why should n't young people *be* young? Nell, I 'll come any time, and matronize; and you 'll see how nice the new way is," she added, to the refractory younger sister.

"No, I shall not, Effie. While I live in my father's house, and at *his* table, I shall eat my dinners with him, even if he had nothing to say about it, which I think he will."

Mrs. Kaynard diverted the subject. "The Bannians, and all their set, are just wild about Anna Maddison. Do you think she is such a beauty, Nell?"

"She has n't the first bit of beauty — regularly. She has *effect*. It is all that brazen-brown hair of hers, and her general picturesqueness and the face-play and the little turns and gestures. She 's dramatic."

"A girl deserves more credit for that kind of beauty than for born beauty, I think," said Euphemia.

"Credit!" France was surprised into the exclamation. She did not mean to be priggish, or to put down everything; but that word had something in it that hurt her, as well as moved her scorn. She felt as if everything were being already put down — cheapened. Was that how a girl's ways were to be looked at and accounted for? It took away all the ideal sweetness of a woman's being and doing. Getting herself up, — *achieving* beauty, or something more distinguishing; aiming consciously at what should be spontaneous and native, to be

anything; studying it all the time, and almost avowing it as study; not ashamed to take praise and admiration for it. Was this what was true of a class, having "that kind of beauty"? And other women giving *credit!* It really seemed as if it were demanded to make one creditable, like having stylish gowns.

"There goes France's nose again," said Helen. "It 's got the very tip of Miss Ammah's. You can't say the first thing before her. She 's always deprecating. She 's always sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. She 's born into the wrong world."

"France is preoccupied. She has got some world of her own, real or imaginary. She brings everything into some sort of comparison. I can see her do it. She 's more like an engaged girl than a girl with a fate to find out. She 's awfully settled."

Axminster carpets and portières are convenient things for all the little refinements of human nature, when it would like to act out gently its primitive moods. Before Euphemia had ended her sentence, France, without the opening or shutting of a door, or the sound of a footstep, had withdrawn herself.

"Now she 's offended," said Helen bluntly.

"No," returned France's clear voice from the wide, square hall outside, as she moved on quietly toward the small back drawing-room through its open folding-doors. "Only put out, into the third person. The third person discreetly facilitates the conversation." And she passed across into the library beyond, shutting its door half to behind her as she entered, and went over and sat down by the bright fire.

She wanted something from outside that should overbear the hot color in her cheeks. In the dim little evening-room, the gas not yet lighted, the others had not known of it. And she had kept her voice so absolutely cool. But she took herself to task now as to why, and precisely when it had come up.

She knew quite well; it had begun, absurdly, with just that sudden word, "Israel." And it had gone on, flaming intenser from some deeper feeding, as Effie's speech went on.

It was not vexation: it was conviction.

She *was* odd; she knew that; it was because she had been at

odds; there was something true in Helen's saying, "she is born into the wrong world." At any rate, she was not yet born into her right one. And this world around her, and she in it, were growing more at odds than ever. She felt herself cranky and jarring; that was the way it was coming upon her, she supposed; that was the way people turned into old maids, the odd women. Yes; she was very likely to be an old maid.

And with that the color surged up again.

Only for that little while last summer, she had been, or had been growing, at evens with things. Among those true, simple people, in the presence of those mighty, sweet realities of God's world, just as He had made it, she had been running with, not against, the current of the days. Here it was all crisscross again. And she had no hold there; and here she was held fast. She had no right to expect ever to have the way made for her to go to Fellaiden again. And what of Fellaiden would ever come down here, now?

She remembered, thinking of the crisscross, what she had heard Mother Heybrook say one day, concerning some affairs that were spoken of. It had been the nearest she had ever heard her come to direct censure of anybody. "Everything goes so with them alwers; their luck is alwers in a snarl," that was what Mother Heybrook replied to. She said in her gentle way, "When things go crisscross with people, alwers, it's most likely they've took a cross-track somewhers theirselves, — or some of their folks," — putting the blame as far back, and making it as impersonal, as she could. "But it *don't* go alwers, *ever*," she added, brightening up into the great final hope that softened and smoothed all with her. "The whole thread is n't in any snarl."

Yes, Effie had touched it. She was preoccupied. What had been merely restless half-satisfaction once was a definite weighing and finding wanting, now. She was bringing everything into comparison. How had Effie known so much, knowing no more?

She had been so near real people, who meant every bit of their lives, that it was quite impossible to come back into tiresome, trivial, little social appearances, little ambitions and

laborings to make things *seem* a certain way. Behind the seeming, what was there?

She brought everything to that measure, — yes, it was the measure of a man. She had learned it in him. That very name, Israel, the name of her friend, had power in its merest chance sound and mention. Was she ashamed of that?

She was neither ashamed nor vexed; but she was convicted.

This friend, what was she to do henceforth without him? He had become to her her Great Pyramid; the sign and token for her, yes, to the Lord of hosts, in this land of Egypt.

And yet, here she was without him. She had put this winter, how much more she could not know, between him and her. And while he was inward sign and strength to her, they were none the less drifting apart.

Drifted apart in so short a time, and with that promise of friendship between them?

What people are to us may be always there, but there may be long, sorrowful times of missing them nevertheless, through not having apprehended, in the day of its grace, just what that belonging ought to have been.

Life-drift is like the drift of the sea: you think you have just struck out a few arms' lengths from the shore; you think it is close behind you there, and that you can turn back to its safety and rest at any minute; you would n't else have cast yourself into the waves. But you are floating, floating; and the tide is setting out; it is carrying you away from reach; your safe, sweet shore is lost; you shall never return to it.

Flip Merriweather had shown her a letter; there had been these words in it: "Rael did not stay long enough to be spoken to. He's always off now. He's all taken up at the parsonage."

Was Rael drifting, changing, away from what she knew he had been for that little while? Was the one point of all their lives at which they could have come nearest each other passed, leaving only the vague result of "friendship," that may hold and let go what it will?

She had done it herself. She had put all those chances between. She had told him, with that marked reservation, that he might be her friend.

She wondered if Fellaiden itself were there yet, just that hundred and fifty miles off, — Fellaiden, with the snows upon it, as she had wished that she might see it?

She wondered if next summer Miss Ammah would, by any possibility, ask her again; and if not, what would ever come of all the last summer, — the only piece of her life that had been vitally lived.

This was the way, of course, that people turned into old maids.

And then Mother Heybrook's sweet, old, patient voice made itself heard again in the spirit: "It *don't* go so alwers. The whole thread is n't in any snarl."

What then? The thread has to break sometimes, or to be reeled slowly off, through loops and catches of trouble, some backward, different way. The *thread* may be kept safe; true, but these years of our lives are the winding.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TWENTY QUESTIONS.

Mr. Kingsworth wrote a letter to Miss Ammah telling her of all these things. "Is there nothing we can do about it? . . . I feel the burden of a power that I cannot use. Rael Heybrook is so proud. . . . Dear friend, do you at all know the mind of Miss Everidge?" These were fragments of his sentences.

"That's a man that needs translating," Miss Ammah said aloud, in the solitude of her own room at the Berkeley, when she had read Bernard's three pages. "I don't mean," she corrected in the ear of vacancy, "*interpreting*, — though that's another fact to most minds, — but taking off the planet. And I'm afraid if he gets all the help that belongs to him, it will happen."

"Take Lyman in hand," she wrote back to her friend. "That will ease your mind, and Rael can't refuse for his brother. You can do it 'gradooal' as they say up there. . . . As to France Everidge's mind, she has got to come to it herself."

At this moment, Miss Ammah Tredgold would not have put one straw in the way to turn Frances Everidge's mind in this direction or in that. She liked the girl heartily. She grew on to like her more than any other "young person with character forming" that she could "get and give with." But France was getting more than belonged to her.

Why should it be *both* of them? Either would have done munificently. "And if she should have the impertinence — yes, that's just the word, look in Webster for that!" she said again peremptorily to unretorting silence — "not to take either of them!"

This mood of Miss Ammah's was precisely coincident with

France's own settling in her mind that she was to be an old maid.

I suppose every girl has had some period in her life in which she has fixed this matter in like manner with herself, and begun, as it were, to make her will concerning the things of life that she has been interested in, and the future disposal of her energies.

France could not believe in æsthetics and high art as a cult. She had no distinct Woman-Emancipation-and-Expansion theories of her own or ready-made. She had not been trained to a self-sacrifice that had led her into any formed plans of beneficence; and, as she had permitted Sarell Gately to deduce, she was "not religious." And a Boston girl must have something for an ideal and a finality. Style and fashion she despised more bitterly than they deserved, perhaps; but it was the sort of style and fashion that she had seen.

Do not think, girl-reader, that I am asserting or implying that in the world of wealth and elegance there are not women of lovely life, who wear these things as they wear their clothes, because they are there to put on, and it does not lie in their way to use homespun; but close to and intermixed with the range of such lives, that simply grow where they were put, realizing the greater demand laid upon them because their outward things are made easy and beautiful, there is a little underworld that makes a seeking and a business of its uprising into the externalities in which alone it discerns the life above it, verily supposing it to stir and feel only in its cuticle as itself does; that strives for the putting on, not the putting forth, — for the raiment, and not the righteousness that may be in the raiment; not knowing that to find the first shall be to have the clothing of it in "the things" that the Father sees are needful for its most beautiful revelation.

A girl like France could be very restless in this raiment-seeking world, and yet not altogether lifted up and made alive in a higher.

She took more than ever to the society of Miss Ammah, whom she really loved, beside that she represented to her now all that had at once blessed and disorganized her, — represented, also,

all chance or connection for her yet to come with the strange, sweet life she had had one summer dream of. "Too," to use Mother Heybrook's phraseology, she "sororized," in her erratic way, when the erratic impulse was upon her, with the sisters at the Pyes' Nest, mostly "to see how it would seem," she pretended to herself. But here also was a live link with Fellaiden.

She was always ready to be the one for a day at "the place," when directions were to be sent to the servants there, or things that were done with were to be taken out and properly bestowed at home, and other things found and put together that were wanted for town. On these days she often ran down to lunch, or stopped for an early tea, with the kind old Misses Chat and Bab and Mag. "I think one of these days," she said one afternoon there, "I shall set up for a Prodigal Daughter. I shall ask for the goods coming to me, and go to housekeeping with them. It is so nice to have a Nest. I don't see why a woman must needs be married to have that. I shall want to do things. I honor my father and my mother, but I can't always be just the fringe to *their* tapestry. I've got to be made into some kind of cloth myself, or go all to ravellings. I may turn good, and take in paupers, and I could n't do that in mamma's house. Can't a woman be an individuality, unless she goes into a profession or on a platform or has a studio? Why can't she have a vocation for independent domesticity, without waiting for all her dear relations to die and leave her their money? I really do want to go to housekeeping."

"It would be awfully queer of you," said Miss Mag, with her deep-dropping emphasis. "*Everybody* would say so!"

"Then why is n't it exactly three times queerer for Miss Chat and Bab and you?"

"Why! There are three of us; and you are one, all sole alone. And it happened for us."

"Three times one are three," replied France gravely. "That's what I said. And why should n't we make things happen, — one thing as well as another, I mean, and without calamities?"

Miss Mag gave a little nervous twitch, and said, a trifle dully and mechanically, "You 're *so* funny! To go away from your

family, and have a house,— without any family of your own! I don't really believe anybody ever *heard* of such a thing."

Miss Mag did not in the least suppose the girl to be serious, but she always felt that a proposition had to be argued, however absurd, on the face of its own presentation.

"I don't see why I should n't have a house," persisted France.

"But no *family!*"

"I don't see why I should n't have a family."

"My gracious!" Miss Mag's emphasis was strong again. "*What* an odd girl you are! What *would* Chat and Bab say?"

"I could choose my family,— from time to time, or even altogether. It might be part of my own family, at the times; or it might be out of the highways and hedges; and then perhaps it would have to be altogether."

"I don't think you know what you are talking about; and I guess you *would* have a nest!" said Miss Mag, glancing around at the China jars and the easels and the cloisonné plates and the macramé fringes. And then that little nervous twitch came again, as if something hurt her.

"I don't suppose I do," France acquiesced with a sudden sigh, changing her mood. "I could n't make a nest like this, — and I'm not good enough for the other!" and some reflex meaning in her own words started a tremble in her voice as she ended.

"Now you 're in earnest," said Miss Mag, laying her hands and her knitting-work down in her lap, with a half-stitch on the needles. "Now you 're queerer than ever!"

"Where are the other ladies?" asked France, with just as abrupt a return to her ordinary manner.

Miss Mag answered her in a tone quite as suddenly changed as her own. "Chat 's got one of her nervous headaches, and Bab is sitting with her. Chat has been rather miserable lately — and — what did you half cry for, France? You 've set me out, and I can't stop."

And to France's consternation, Miss Mag's head went down recklessly among her knitting needles, and she sobbed hysterically.

They had both been getting very queer, certainly.

France was sobered from whatever had been whimsical in her talk; she was half ashamed of her own solicitudes that had been under the nonsense, the solicitudes of her twenty years, when here was this woman of near half a century, not lived through or calmed down from all her troubles yet. In the midst of this generous self-shame came the involuntary application of a conclusion, whimsical as any, that there was no escape, even into old maidism.

"Dear Miss Margaret!" she went up to her, and put her hand on her shoulder. "What is it? You were tired, and I have worried you. I 'm so sorry!"

"Yes,— never mind,— that was it; that was all," said Miss Mag, shaking up her head again, and making extraordinary creases — that could never have come from her way of sleeping, but rather, a good many of them, from a way of not sleeping, lately, perhaps — in her limp cheeks, with trying to laugh before the quiver of the cry was over. "That was all, and it 's no matter. I don't *mean!* — worried me? No, *you* did n't. There,— don't say anything more about it. If I talk I shall make a mess; and it is n't really *anything*. Chat and Bab would n't have me behave so for the world."

France could but let her compose herself her own way; but when she was composed, and they had managed a few minutes' talk without any queerness in it except the customary queerness of saying anything rather than what is most vividly in the mind, she bade good-by, leaving a kind message for the other sisters, and walked away to the station, meeting Flip Merriweather on her way down.

Him she took by the hand eagerly. "*Could* you turn round?" she asked. "There is n't a minute to spare for the five o'clock in; and you could take the half-past out again. I want to speak to you."

Flip Merriweather would have turned round if it had been over Niagara. They got into the last car, and took the last seat. There is no better place for a special talk, with a few vacant places between the talkers and anybody else; and this car was half empty.

"Now I shall ask you right out," said France. "Is anything the matter at the Nest? What ails Miss Mag?"

"Go on," said Flip. "Ask more questions, — twenty questions. Perhaps there 'll come one I can answer. I don't feel authorized to pile in a whole general subject till I'm close cornered. But I 'm glad you 've begun."

"Is it Miss Chat's head?"

"That 's some way off, but,— yes, I should say it was."

"Is she very bad?"

"She's the best woman in the world, except Bab and Mag. Don't get off the line."

"What 's the matter with her head?"

"'T aint level,— or was n't."

"O Philip! Have they made any mistake? Is it money?"

"*Yes*," Philip answered emphatically. "I should say it was; and now you *are* coming to it. Go on; I won't begin anything. Get it out of me, if you can."

"*Tickets!*" and of course France's trip-ticket was at the bottom of her bag, and it was fully a minute and a half before it was found and the injured conductor had punched it.

"Oh, we 're losing so much time! Do tell me, Philip! Is the money lost?"

"Nothing 's lost when you know where it is."

"Where is it?"

"Hercules Mining Company. Remember, you catechized me."

"And is anything the matter with the Hercules Mining Company?"

"Yes,— water."

"In the mine?"

"And in the stocks. Thirty cents assessments. No dividends. Somebody 's comfortable, but it ain't at the Pyes' Nest."

"Oh, when did they buy in?"

"When it was fifty dollars a share. When it was running up, last summer."

"Now it is — ?"

"Nought-seventy-five,— *asked*. Par value ten dollars. And they want me to sell out for what I can get. Oh, thunder!"

and Flip whisked himself half round, and looked out at the window.

"How much?" France asked, in a low, pitiful tone. She could not stop to feel about it. She must find out all she could.

"Forty shares apiece. Six thousand dollars."

"But that is n't so *very* much."

"Only all the rest is in Grand Tangent, and now there ain't any dividends here."

"Phil! how are they managing?"

"House mortgaged. There,—now you 've got the whole of it. And I wish I was n't in it. They don't understand the first thing, except that the money don't come, and the assessment notices do. I have to make up anything I can for the minute. As soon as I get into the house, they begin. Why did n't *you* begin before?"

"How could I guess? And what good will it do, now I have guessed?" asked France, mournfully.

"I don't know. Only there 's *one* more friend in it."

When they got out at the Boston station Flip had just time to see her across to a street-car, and run round to his own train. As they walked up the platform, France said,—

"Philip, I want to beg your pardon."

"What for?" asked Phil.

"For not seeing half the splendid stuff there was in you, when I saw you first."

"Miss France, I want to thank you."

"What for?" echoed France, not stopping to think of jocoseness.

"For seeing some of the trash that was in me, and helping me see it."

After France sat down in the car her hand tingled blessedly with Phil's last hearty pressure, and her face was so bright that people opposite looked to see.

She was thinking of another parting, months before.

"There is a little bit of Fellaiden down there before you. I wish you would look after Phil Merriweather in some kind way."

Perhaps some time Rael Heybrook would know how she had

cared for his wish; perhaps, through those letters of Phil's, something might have crept round to him already.

If Flip felt like that, she was glad they had a way of hearing from him at Heybrook Farm.

But now, as she took her transfer ticket and the conductor stopped a West End car for her, the brightness faded down a little. Turning nearer homeward, she turned back suddenly in her thought to her poor old friends. Poor Miss Chat and Bab and Mag!

Was there anything, however queer, that might be done for them?

She thought of one thing, and she was just queer enough to try it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

Mr. Everidge was in his little smoking-room. It occupied an angle between the library and the back drawing-room, in a projection which faced that of the conservatory, not counting among the main rooms of the house. All these rooms gave free access the one with another, or could be shut off at pleasure. Mr. Everidge had appropriated this little sanctum with alacrity, — so cosy, so withdrawn, and yet so central at will to the life of the house.

It was just after an early Saturday dinner. On this day it was the Everidge custom to return to more primitive usage, and make place for what the head of the house called "the old settlers' Saturday night," which meant tea at eight o'clock and a little dish of "private baked beans" for himself, which was so borrowed from, often, that it had to be more than once replenished from the kitchen. But on no account would the ladies of the family have tolerated a big platterful all at once.

The cook had been particularly successful in a delicious repast of abridged courses suited to the anticipation of a third meal. The family had also been alone, and a day without guests was a boon to the elders.

"Too," Mr. Everidge had had a good morning down town. It had been one of the days when things ran as in oiled grooves, each sliding into its order, none crowding or hurrying out of place before another. There had not needed to be any switching or siding off, any bustles of running up and backing down. He had also made some good sales, and shifted profitably some considerable investments.

As the sun, setting now more and more toward the north,

struck in through a street vista, and sent a yellow beam across the small apartment, which seemed, with the light clouds of fragrant smoke, to get entangled there and lose its way out again, making a great deal of itself in a mixed, broken, glittering way, Mr. Everidge's thoughts, vague and comfortable, were lit up in like dreamy, shifting manner, touching here and there some puff of hopeful plan or inceptive notion or satisfied recollection, and without need of concentration to immediate purpose, gently illuminating everything at once that had been, was, or was likely to be.

It was at this moment that France, giving a little supererogatory tap of ceremony at the half-open door from the library, came in upon a certain timid, special, earnest errand.

Undoubtedly the juncture affects, and effects, much. But what accomplishes the juncture?

"Come in, little Fran'," said her father pleasedly.

"Are you sure you won't send me out again, papa?" France asked him, coming in and sitting down where that yellow sunbeam instantly caught with some of its wandering threads among the light edge-fibres of her hair and made another mixed-up radiance.

"Not until I send the other sunshine out too," said Mr. Everidge. "You two came in together at opposite sides. Now the place is about as full as it can hold, or I care for."

"You 'll make me cough and choke me out if you begin on another cigar," said France. "There 's just enough of *that* here for me. And I 've come for a very serious, important talk."

France had the clever feminine instinct to begin with a little bit of graceful, insignificant tyranny, submitting to which her masculine companion would taste the sweetness of a chivalrous indulgence, and be more ready to prolong and intensify the experience by a graver yielding.

"And it is n't very cheerful, either. I must make haste before the sunshine goes."

Mr. Everidge dropped the end of his cigar into the tall cuspidor beside him, turned further round toward his daughter, then settled himself back again in his deep chair and said "Begin."

"I don't know but you 'd better have had the cigar, after all. I 'm a good deal frightened. I *may* choke, as it is."

Mr. Everidge put his hand in his breast-pocket and drew forth a wallet. He was used to France's whimsical beginnings when she wanted money, and aware that beneath them was a real, invincible dislike to asking for it.

"How much is it, France?"

"O papa! It is six thousand dollars!"

Mr. Everidge's eyebrows went up, and he put back the wallet. "You are like the New York dentist who told the gentleman coming in to pay a recent bill that it was fifty-six hundred dollars. He did n't carry so much about him."

"You remember, papa, last summer when you told me up at Fellaiden about your making all that silver money, and that I should say how some of it should be spent?"

"Yes. Did I promise anything?" He was willing to let France come round to the explanation of her extraordinary request in her own way.

"Only that I should have my share, papa. You gave Effie twenty thousand dollars the day she was married."

"Yes, in effect. She will have the income of what is worth that. It was far better than I should have expected, even a few months ago, to be able to do. But affairs have gone wonderfully well with me all this year. Property begins to stand for something; it is alive again. And I have learned a lesson from the depression. I am securing things so as to provide an equal portion for each of you in turn, as you leave me; or when I leave you, I hope, a great deal more."

"Dear papa, there is no question of you or me leaving each other. We are going to spend money together for ever so long yet. So could n't we take six out of my twenty now, if we wanted to very much indeed? The rest would grow up to twenty again before I, — in those dozen years, you know, papa."

"Unless you wanted five or six more next week, prodigal daughter," answered Mr. Everidge, much mystified, somewhat discomposed, and inclined at any rate to keep up the defensive play of the subject as long as he could.

"That 's just what I said!" exclaimed France. "I should like, for some things, to be a prodigal daughter. Only I would

try to spend it for some sort of — Do you remember how I pronounced it one Sunday evening in our reading, when I was a little girl ? "

Mr. Everidge laughed. France had rendered it " righteous living."

" Do you think you know now how to spell it any better ? " he asked.

" I could try, I said. Papa, now let me tell you all about it. It 's those dear old Miss Pyes, and the Nest is mortgaged. And they have got six thousand dollars where they can't get it back, and the rest where — this year — it does n't pay any dividends."

" Blessed old ninnies ! " ejaculated Mr. Everidge. " But do you suppose they would take six thousand dollars from you, or me, or anybody ? These are things we can't help people in."

" There must be ways," said France, " if people would take the trouble to go round. There 's poor Mrs. Dr. Janway, without any property but that land — and taxes ; and it 's *good* land, worth ever so much to hold on to, they say, if somebody that could afford to would only buy it ! "

" Yes. There would be no end to these things, France."

" I don't know. I do think it would come out, somewhere," answered the girl, with eager eyes. " But of course it would n't be for one person to do all the things. All I want to do — I mean, of course, I want *you* to do — only nobody need ever lose by it except me, if you would fix it so, is to buy — "

France hesitated.

" Very well, let us hear the whole. Buy what ? "

" A hundred and twenty shares of Hercules mining stock."

" Whe-*e-w* ! " Mr. Everidge fairly jumped from his chair.

" O papa, where is that other cigar ? Do smoke it, and listen, and think ! "

Mr. Everidge walked to the window.

" You 're shutting up my sunlight, papa."

" France ! I hope you 're not going to grow 'ismatic ? "

" No, papa, *pris*matic, if you 'll only let the sun shine on me." France was as demure as a kitten, and as quick to play with anything ; but there was a thrill in her voice nevertheless.

"You see it was all that silver fever, when it began; and people — you, papa, made such sudden money. I think they ought to be helped out of it."

"Do you know that Hercules stock is n't worth a half penny?"

"Yes, papa; but *they* don't. And they 've been paying assessments, and everything will be stopped, and then they *will* know it. Then you *could n't* do anything."

"Where did you find out all this?"

"I saw they were in trouble, and I asked. Philip Merriweather knew."

"What is the rest of their money in?"

"Grand Tangent."

"That 's good. It will come up again."

"Yes, if they only had this six thousand back for the meanwhile. Papa, don't you think when things come round to us so, we *are* in them, whether we want to be or not?"

Mr. Everidge came over beside France again. "Fran'," he said, "you are a good girl; but you 're an odd one. You don't understand the relation of things. You would turn the world topsy-turvy."

"I suppose the right things would. But I 'm going away, papa, now. I 've done my errand. I 've told all I know; and as you say, it is n't much. The things *you* know may make my odd out even," and she laughed, and kissed her father, and left him, with a certain look of withheld beseeching in her face.

As she passed through the library door, the little sunbeam from the other side, called back from its gentle play, vanished quickly across its leagues of earth-surface, drawn down into the dip of the horizon after the vanishing sun.

Mr. Everidge sat in the twilight and thought things over. "She 's the only woman I know of who understands how to take herself off before the word too much," he said to himself.

Whatever else he said or remembered — but why should we expect to know more about that, just now, than France?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BENEDICITE.

The Everidges, while in town, went to the Church of the Epiphany.

The music and the preaching were fine, and the congregation was imposing.

France enjoyed the preaching, and parts of the music; but now that she was beginning to seek a little more into the centres of things, the congregation, and even the choir, often distracted her. She liked better, sometimes, to go with Miss Ammah to a quiet little church on a side street, where the seats were free, and the Sunday-school children sang the Glorias and Canticles. Very often Philip Merriweather came into town and went with them. Then, frequently, he and Miss Ammah came home with France to the Sunday lunch. These were the arrangements that fell in the day after France's talk with her father in the smoking-room.

Helen had gone home from church with the Sampson Kaynards.

After France had taken off her hat and sacque in her own room, she came down and found Miss Tredgold and Phil in the library; the former with her feet on the fender, and herself politely only half occupied with a book.

"I want to try if I can make out the notes of that lovely 'Works of the Lord' they sang to-day," she said. "Come over, Philip, into the piano-room."

They crossed the back drawing-room, from which a narrow curtained arch led into the L end of the evening-room. The piano was opposite in the alcove.

When France's pure voice struck the sweet first, third, and fifth, as she tried the opening words of the Canticle, and then

went up to the octave upon the "Praise Him," dropping down in low, accented notes through fifth and third with "And magnify," to rise again to the clear, strong fifth with the second "Him," and return to the keynote with the "forever," the sounds stole through to Miss Ammah's ears and feeling in such fashion that she rose from her chair, left her book in it, and moved round through the hall into the evening-room. She thought she would like to hear what France would make of her chant.

"I don't know that that is quite right," she heard her say. "I have n't a perfect musical memory, or understanding of these constructions. But that is the expression of it. Is n't it beautiful?"

And then came the second verse; France had brought in a Prayer Book with her.

> "O ye Angels of the Lord! bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever,"

"I 'm rather glad I have n't heard these things all my life; I suppose I should have got too used to them."

"It 's queer," said Phil; "all the over and over of it, like the 'mercy endureth forever.' It seems to me so ridiculously that it *does*, when they read that psalm."

"O Phil, — but see how this begins and goes through! See the *grandeur* of it! 'All ye Works,' — first the Angels and the Heavens, then the 'Waters above the Firmament'; then 'All ye Powers,'—'O ye Sun and Moon, and the Stars of Heaven; O ye Showers and Dew; Ye Winds of God; O ye Fire and Heat; Ye Winter and Summer, ye Dews and Frosts, ye Ice and Snow'; then the things the Powers make, — 'O ye Nights and Days, — O ye Light and Darkness, — O ye Lightning and Clouds'; and then it drops down to the very earth. 'O let the Earth bless the Lord!' Then the high things on the earth: 'O ye Mountains and Hills,' then the 'Green Things upon the Earth,' and then down *into* the earth. 'O ye Wells, O ye Seas and Floods'; and then the living things, 'O ye Whales and all that move in the Waters, — ye Fowls of the Air, — ye Beasts and Cattle.' And at last the 'Children of Men,' and amongst

them the 'Israel' and the 'Priests of the Lord,' — chosen out of Israel; and then see what is put last, as if that were the way, after all, round to the Heavens and the Angels again. 'O ye Servants of the Lord, — ye Spirits and Souls of the Righteous, — O ye holy and humble Men of Heart!' I think that is the great 'round and round' Miss Ammah talks about. And I think it is grand," she ended, with her words slower and lower, "to be anywhere in it."

Then she struck the piano again, and sung the last three sentences: —

> "O ye servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever.
> O ye Spirits and Souls of the righteous, bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever.
> O ye *holy and humble Men of Heart*, bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever."

Her voice and enunciation dwelt with a wonderful, tender emphasis, italicizing that final apostrophe. France had forgotten all about herself; she had been lifted up. It was the grandeur of it, as she had said.

When she had been in the middle of her rapid rehearsal, there had come another auditor into the evening-room, — Mr. Everidge, looking through the apartments to find Miss Ammah. He wanted to have a little talk with her.

Miss Ammah had hushed him, noiselessly, with her hand upon his arm. "Don't break in on those children!" she whispered. And Mr. Everidge seated himself on the low sofa beside his old friend.

So he heard that sweet, fervent rendering; fresh, animated with a young, true appreciation; uttered freely, — just as freely as if it had been spoken of some inspiring secular song, the song of a nation, perhaps. And why not? Was it not the song of the Nation of nations?

But he had not found out so much about his little Fran' before, as in these last two days.

"Do you think," said Phil Merriweather, "they *mean* all they sing and say, — all of them, — such a lot of it? That 's what bothers me."

"It 's all there to *be* meant," returned France's clear voice. "And I 'm glad it 's somewhere. Do you think they mean all they sing and say in *any* church, all of them?"

"No. And that 's why I hate it, — or did, — almost. I *know* they don't mean it. And I can't. So what should we keep saying it for? It is n't honest."

"What don't you mean, Philip?"

"Well, for one thing," — and here there was a faint rustling of the leaves of the book, — "this. I don't want to be 'among the saints,' set up 'in glory everlasting.' I 'd rather be among common men, down here, doing something."

"'Holy and humble men of heart,'" quoted France, half interrogatively.

"Don't know about the first part. 'Men of heart' is pretty near the thing."

"What if that *is* the glory?"

"What?"

"Doing something. Helping along. Making out the righteousness, making things right. Having a good, strong heart."

"If that 's it, I 've no objection to go in for it."

"If that is it, I think you are in for it."

"But, glory! a great shine. Who wants to sit and shine?"

"I don't see but you 've got back to the 'humble,' then."

"Look in your Webster for that," came Miss Ammah's voice from the evening-room.

"Are you there, Miss Ammah? Come and help us, then."

Mr. Everidge's hand was laid now on Miss Ammah's arm. "No," she answered. "Help yourselves. I 'm resting."

France really went and fetched the big dictionary from the library.

"There!" she said. "'Humble,' from 'humilis,' — on the earth, the ground. That 's where you want to be, — at the beginning of things. Now see what 'holy' says. Here it is: 'sound, safe, whole.' Don't you like that? Is n't that what we all like things to come round to?"

"Dictionary-Bible is pretty good," said Phil. "But Bible-brogue!"

"Let 's find 'glory.' — 'Clarus, — bright, clear.' What 's

the matter with that? See here, Philip. I've just thought. Was n't all the glory in the New Testament just making things clear and right and bright? Was n't the wine made at the wedding 'manifesting forth the glory'? And was n't it the righteous — the people that cared for the right and did it — that were to shine as the sun?"

France Everidge was "not religious," and she could n't bear what Philip named as "Bible-brogue." She steered carefully around it. But neither could she bear, when she came face to face with it, that a boy like Phil should be growing so good and "splendid" and pretending, or imagining himself, to be scouting the very *best*ness. Besides all which, she had an intense love for the thorough searching through things.

She slipped the big dictionary off her lap upon an ottoman, and turned to the piano again.

"I wish I had the exact notes of that chant," she said; and then her fingers softly touched the chords, and she sang, —

> "O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever.
>
> . . . . .
>
> O ye holy and humble Men of Heart, bless ye the Lord;
> Praise Him, and magnify Him forever!"

Mr. Everidge rose quietly, and walked away out of the evening-room. Miss Ammah went round through the small drawing-room, in more deliberate evidence, and joined him in the library, where they had their little talk. Brief enough, for the lunch-bell interrupted; but nevertheless a good deal to the point. Although, indeed, in the course of it, Mr. Everidge did suddenly and irrelevantly propound to Miss Ammah this question:

"I wonder how all this great friendship strikes you, Ammah, between that girl and boy?"

"George Everidge! he 's seventeen and she 's twenty. There are whole lifetimes between them! and if not, I know better!"

And France's father said, "So she is — twenty. Only, I 've always thought of her as such a child, you know!"

The next afternoon, Mr. Everidge drove out to his "place," and made also a quiet, friendly call upon the Miss Pyes.

CHAPTER XL.

QUIT CLAIM.

"I HAVE been consulted," said Mr. Everidge, who had carefully chosen the leading words in his little speech beforehand, and had to make the slightest possible catches and pauses now and then, to be quite sure that he fitted in the right one, "in regard to — certain — investments — which I was told you wanted — advice — upon; and I thought as I was out of town to-day, I might as well ride round and give my — opinion — in person."

"You are so *kind*, I am *sure!*" cried Miss Mag, who received him. "But then Chat and Bab and I *always* say so!"

There are more difficulties in the way of some men for doing a silly thing, than in that of most for doing a shrewd one. It is against all their antecedents, against the propulsion of the whole order of their affairs. It is like a few drops of a flowing stream trying suddenly to run up-current. If it were achieved, even, it would be a hazardous thing. It might originate a small, fresh maelstrom, into which new interests might be misled to their engulfing.

Mr. Everidge had no intention of appearing as the purchaser of Hercules shares. He not only would not let his left hand know what his right hand, forgetting its cunning, was about to do, but he could not even do it in a regular, right-handed way. His only facility lay in the utter, business-innocent simplicity of the three old ladies.

Chat and Bab came into the room, and Mag reiterated to them how kind Mr. Everidge was, and how she had been telling him that they always said so. Miss Mag was one of those persons who make their words do service as they do their gowns, when they have once put them together; or rather, perhaps,

who for fear of self-repetition or plagiarism, are continually quoting themselves and giving themselves credit. "As I said the other day," — "As I was remarking to So and So," — became, in her formula, "I told them so, Chat and Bab," or "We said so, all of us, Chat and Bab and I." And in such a little *da capo* as this, it had to be again, "I told him, Chat and Bab, and we do, don't we?"

"Thanks," returned Mr. Everidge, with final, inclusive gratitude. "And now, what is the point, if you please? To buy or to sell?"

"He heard," Mag further reviewed to her sisters, "that we wanted to — do something, — to get advice, — about our stocks. And I —" Mag was absolutely in danger of going round that ring of their united opinions of their friend again, if he had not averted it by interposing at the word.

"Oh, stocks! something already invested, then? You must excuse my interrupting you, but I have n't very much time." And he half drew his watch, and glanced at it.

Miss Chat took the lead then, with her most direct and business-like manner.

"It 's those Hercules mines, sir. Good property, I suppose; for we paid fifty dollars a share for it. But it 's expensive holding it, and we would like to change it if we could. Only we think we ought to get a fair price for it, and there does n't seem to be any demand for it." Miss Chat's speech sounded very well to herself, and she did not doubt Mr. Everidge was impressed by it. Which I do not doubt, either.

"Yes," he answered meditatively, as if it were appraisal of a tangible commodity, to be discounted a little, merely, at the second hand or for temporary depreciation. "It is n't worth quite so much as it was. And they 're assessing, I believe."

"O dear, yes," said Miss Mag, "and that 's just what we can't see through, Chat and Bab and I. When a thing 's once bought and paid for, what *must* you keep buying it over again for?"

"Occasionally," said Mr. Everidge, "we buy an elephant. And the elephant has to be fed."

"O, I wish we knew a man who wanted to get up a menagerie! We all wish so, — don't we, Chat and Bab?"

"Of course I suppose we must expect to lose *something*, — selling at a poor time," said Miss Chat, resuming the capable head of affairs. "But it is n't reasonable that we should *give* it away!"

The returns of internal amusement were coming in upon Mr. Everidge so fast that he almost felt as if he were getting the interest of his possible purchase beforehand.

"Women are at a great disadvantage in the money market," he observed gravely. "No one can operate successfully who is not on the spot. Would you be willing to put the matter into my hands? or, in fact, I might just take it from you, by private transfer, at once and here, and manage it for myself at my leisure. I should n't care to appear as a stockholder, just yet. It might affect matters elsewhere. Suppose I purchase of you, and while these assessments go on I simply hand over the amounts notified to you, to be paid in on your own account?"

"Why, that would be being a perfect Angel Gabriel, Mr. Everidge! But then we always *did* say, — Chat and Bab and I, —"

"I should n't wish you to lose by it, eventually, Mr. Everidge," said sensible, considerate Miss Chat. "Of course, I suppose your knowledge and opportunities, — the truth is, *we* never ought to have meddled with it."

"Yes, that *is* the truth," assented Mr. Everidge cordially, and relieved to put his foot on some solid fact by which to advance to his purpose. "And pardon me — there are always conditions in a business transaction — if I make two provisos to our agreement. The first is, that it shall remain absolutely unmentioned, even between ourselves at any time, that such a transfer has been made. I have business reasons for that. Never mind what I may happen to do with it, or how or where it may turn out well or ill. You will ask me no questions, and you will acquaint no one with the matter. And the second condition, — that you shall positively promise me you will never, on any inducement, buy into fluctuating fancy stocks again."

"My gracious! I should think not!" exclaimed Miss Bab. "When it has nearly turned us all into paper pulp, this time! I feel as if I had been churned through a mill. *Fluctuating!*"

"But I must say again, *now*, before we promise, that I don't wish you to take a great risk of a loss to yourself, eventually, in doing this," repeated Miss Chat.

"I feel pretty certain I shan't lose anything," said Mr. Everidge. "And I will tell you this much: that I am not acting by my own impulse merely in looking up this Hercules stock, but by wish and advice of another pretty strong party concerned. If I say too much, you will think you had better hold on to it yourselves," he added, laughing, "but I do assure you, according to the very best of my business judgment, I do not think you ladies could by any possibility ever make anything out of it."

Of course he knew he was talking great nonsense, but where was the use of anything else? These women to be going into stock speculations!

His nonsense was to them profound knowledge, upon which they cast themselves as upon a tide that came in on purpose to float them from the rocks, while simply acting for itself in its own regular way. Upon the deep sea of vague, intricate financial possibilities behind it, they thankfully threw the dangerous load that had nearly fixed them high and dry, easily crediting that it would of itself drift somewhere to somebody, though they could float with it no longer.

And then they asked him about the Grand Tangent.

"That's good," he said, "though it may run a trifle lower before it goes up. I can easily sell for you in that if you like. But there would be greater sacrifice of future probable returns than in *this*," giving a very curious pause and accent before and with the last word. He held in his hand now the little bundle of certificates which Miss Chat had produced for him from her lovely antique escritoire.

"Now shall I pay you in cash, or will you let me advise a different investment?"

"I'm afraid we must have *some* cash," replied Miss Chat. "We have been cramped lately, and we shall have immediate occasion for about two thousand dollars."

Which was the amount secured within three weeks by mortgage on the Pyes' Nest.

Mr. Everidge drew a blank check from his wallet and made it out at the pretty escritoire. The very pendent brasses from its many handles seemed to glitter with a sudden smile to the eyes of Miss Chat and Bab and Mag as he did so.

All around the room the little bronzes and the bright tiles and the rainbow china, and even the soft gray herons on the dado, seemed to be glittering and winking and lightening up with congratulations to each other, as if to say, "We are all at home again! The Pyes' Nest is all right and settled again, and there 's a *satisfaction* amongst us!"

For the poor Miss Pyes had been doing all their little household niceties of work lately with such dull limpness under that often-escaping, melancholy-feeble protest, "Only there 's no sort of satisfaction in it now!"

"Will you let me advise for the remainder, and in case you sell out a part also from the Grand Tangent, the New England Mortgage Security Company's bonds for a permanent investment? And if you like, and send me word or say so, I will attend to it at once."

"Oh, we *do* say so, all of us, — don't we, Chat and Bab? We *always* say, *now*, there 's nothing like good, permanent securities." And Miss Mag looked half elated with her achievement of speech, and half apologetically at Miss Chat as having trespassed on her territories.

But Mr. Everidge had scarcely said his courteous farewells and mounted his horse again at the garden gate when the three sisters turned to each other in the little hallway with the confounding question, "What can we possibly say about it all to Phil?"

Greatly to Mr. Merriweather's amusement presently, who knew of course from France that she had "told papa," and that there was another friend in it, and who had also caught a flying glimpse of Mr. Everidge himself on the Avenue Road, direct from the Corner Village, as the five o'clock out passed the crossing at Vernon Square, they solved their difficulty by not asserting any falsehood, but by ingeniously skipping a truth.

When Phil came in, the fire in the library was newly laid up, and a perfectly artistic pile of little logs was blazing. The

brazen tips of the folding-fender were scintillating with its reflection, the little circular concave mirrors had redoubled, distant, dancing lights in them; the dark, polished woods of the furniture palpitated with bright flickers upon every protuberant round; the gay autumn leaves in vases and lovely clusters against the walls were glorified; it seemed as if the herons had set their humpy shoulders a hair's breadth further back in pure, sudden pride, and moulted their gray plumes to feather themselves with moonlight. The oval supper-table was set under the softly shaded lamp, where it was only put for special little festivals, and the glass and silver on it made more twinkling, radiating points.

Beside all which, Miss Bab's eyes twinkled, and Miss Chat's nose, that was always sensitive at the end under strong emotion, and Miss Mag's tongue.

"We thought we 'd be all ready for you with a good, solid supper and good news, for we all knew you 'd be so glad to get it, Chat and Bab and I, — did n't we, girls? It 's *so* extraordinary; it 's like a play, or the Children of Israel in the Red Sea! Did n't I say so, Chat and Bab? And did n't I always say there 'd be a way through? And it 's come, and it 's just straightened itself out of its own accord, with the waters standing up on the right hand and on the left, and we 're as good as over, dryshod. Though it 's no sort of use for you to ask us how, for we don't understand a bit about it ourselves, either of us, Chat and Bab, do we? Although Chat did go into that broker's day before yesterday, you know, and came out with that poor head. But we 've heard from the business to-day, and it 's all off our shoulders like Pilgrim's bundle, and you need n't take any more trouble about it, and there certainly is a Providence in things; and there 's Renie coming in this minute with the broiled chicken and the jollyboys, and I have n't given you a chance to go and wash your hands!"

How they had got it all up — the bright fire and the supper-table, and the broiled chicken and the jollyboys, and the lucid incoherence of Miss Mag's explanation — in the half-hour or so since Mr. Everidge's departure was a bird's-nest mystery.

But there it all was, and Phil Merriweather took it as it was presented.

By a circumlocution of "your business man" instead of any mention of "that broker," he generously saved their consciences in such further speech as was necessary for a rational conclusion of the subject by a general account. Meanwhile the ladies left the broiled chicken pretty much to his own separate discussion, not guessing in the least what an inconsiderable reward of merit it was.

Mr. Everidge called France into his smoking-room that night.

He put into her hand a long envelope with several folded papers in it. "There, Fran'," he said, "it belongs to you. It 's the evidence of as absurd a *business* transaction as I was ever guilty of in my life. But I think you and that preacher about the midst of things, up there outside of it all, may give me quit-claim now on the stock-operating account. I don't *believe* there are three more such innocent old geese in the most remote circle of any influence of mine!"

He glanced rather inquisitorially at France when he touched her with that phrase about the preacher, but France was absolutely preoccupied with himself, and there was nothing in all her glowing face but her tender, exulting joy and pride in him.

But after she had thanked and kissed him, and said how lovely it would always be that the Pyes' Nest had not gone to pieces, and how they must be chattering and babbling and magnifying there to-night, it was surely some strange thing that made France go away so quietly into her own room, and when she had put by the papers in the deepest drawer of her davenport lean her head down upon the lid of it, with her cheek resting on its crimson cover, and say, as if she were creeping to some sweet, forlorn refuge, "The dear old gentlemen, the dear old fathers, are the best and the surest, after all!"

CHAPTER XLI.

NUMBER NINE.

THERE is a delightful little puzzle in everybody's hands just now, and I don't wonder they have called it the "Gem."

The fifteen little numbered blocks, put into their small case in a mix, with only one vacant space to move to, are to be shifted back and forth, each to its single present opportunity, till they all come into regular count and order.

Not by pushing any particular one, you find as you work at it, directly and forcibly to its own placé; but only by bringing each, wherever it may start from, into the next best possible situation for helping the general train of movement, or making way for another to pass on into a hopeful sequence.

The less you seem to hurry Number One, the more prosperously it comes round toward its top corner, and the more beautifully Two and Three and the rest file about, and slip to their comfortable stations, each where no other was ever meant or may be allowed to be.

There is a point in this generous little game when things seem smoothly hastening on the best and most obvious principles to a solution.

There is a point in the mingled affairs of sane and right-minded people, when they appear to have got into such a line of march that there remains slight intricacy to straighten, and the story-puzzle seems coming to such a simple end that it hardly need to have been made an undertaking of at all.

Look a minute at where the people we most care for are, in the purposes and action of this small chronicle.

Up in Fellaiden, Rael Heybrook is working for Lyman and the old folks, for the minister and all the public weal; Sarell Bassett is working for Rael and the other Heybrooks; Bernard

Kingsworth is planning for Lyman, that so, against his very self, he may also help the truth between France Everidge and Israel.

France, down here, reaching her kind hand to Phil Merriweather, the only one she knows much how to help, and with him stretching both hands toward a larger help for the pleasant old Miss Pyes, has done the "dear old father," the brisk prosperous, handsome gentleman not yet turned the corner into his fifties, such more interior service, that the man of stocks and exchanges, who is so proud of his name on a company bond and in the market, doing a perfectly ridiculous and unbusiness-like thing, to take a burden off three old women's shoulders that they never ought to have taken on, is learning a new schedule of values not quoted at any board, and realizing a percentage that returns only from a sunken fund.

Miss Ammah Tredgold, with some kink of reserve till France Everidge comes to her own mind, "stands and waits," with the best readiness, when her way opens, but not a minute before, to do anything for anybody.

According to the analogy of the puzzle, such circulation should be bringing them speedily round to serene self-arrangement. And yet, with only three or four months, and a few outward changes between this time and those fair, free days among the hills, when it would have seemed that they so held the blessedest facts and possibilities of life in their own hands that they might hold them back a while without disaster, Rael Heybrook was saying, out of a dark, hard compulsion, — "It is going by; I have been a fool"; and France was aching waywardly with the very tenderness of her insistence that "the dear fathers were the best, after all!"

There are a few last moves, when all looks as if it should come clear, which are the whole crisis, for missing or achievement of the problem. There are more lives that come within a hair's breadth of happiness than were ever lost, in any grand, inevitable devastations.

Just now, the days, the very hours, came freighted with happenings that seemed not momentous in themselves, but which bore upon a secret experience the more searching that it only half acknowledged itself.

Helen Everidge had come home on Sunday night to tell her father and mother that the Kaynards were going to Washington for a month, and wanted her to go with them. They were to leave on Wednesday. This was decided in accordance; and though it took her sister from her, it can hardly be said that it was this, in any great measure, that put that little pathos into France's feeling.

On the Monday afternoon, France had walked round to the Berkeley, and found Miss Ammah's trunk in the middle of her sitting-room. The good lady had had a letter from New York, from the husband of an old friend, begging her to volunteer a visit: his wife was suffering from nervous malady which threatened serious persistence; and some change and cheerful companionship must be contrived for her, while exciting and fatiguing society was put out of the question.

This was a blow. Miss Ammah had not been very satisfactory of late, to be sure. Whatever she might have heard from Fellaiden, and whatever purposes she might be maturing in her own mind for the soon-coming spring and her new home arrangements there, she said very little to France about any of those matters; and France was singularly unwilling to question. Miss Ammah, indeed, bringing up her prudence or her jealousy for the absolute right of things, as a late reserve, was really blocking the way, like the contrary Number Nine in the puzzle. She left France to come to herself in the most hardhearted and immovable manner. If Rael Heybrook wrote to her, as no doubt he did, she made no specific mention of his letters. Yet she had to say something when France told her Flip's news, and tried, with rather patent subtlety, to elicit some comparison of it with what Miss Ammah received from more authentic sources; and France was sure that she regularly heard from Mr. Kingsworth, and that if any great thing happened, she would tell her of it; and withal, she was Miss Ammah, the woman of Great Pyramid inches, whose mere neighborhood was an upholding in the most honest and uncompromising resolution of things, and who would understand her better than anybody else, if there had been anything to understand, or if there were ever to happen to be anything.

For Miss Ammah to go off now to New York, to a fresh, strange interest, and nobody knew what new plans, was as the pilot departing in the midst of the unknown shallows and channels.

Yet it was not that, either, altogether or even chiefly, which made France lay her head down as if she laid some hope down with it, and nestle her heart to that pathetic filial comfort.

Flip Merriweather, who knew how to catch pickerel, was to Miss Ammah's immovable Number Nine as some other last little block that keeps up a perpetual dance between those that might else quietly settle to their relations. He knew that France was always eager to hear "about all the hill-people," and without the slightest discrimination, or question of the need of it, brought her all Hannah Louisa's miscellaneous gossip.

And Sunday night it had been this: —

"We have got three ministers up here, now. Mr. Kingsworth and Rael Heybrook, and Leonora. They have picked up the whole parish amongst them, and they just do make things spin. Not prayer meetings, and that sort entirely; Rael, you know, is n't even converted; but they 're fixing as if they *thought* the kingdom was coming, and there ought to be some kind of a decent place for it to come in. Leonora has spunked up the Sewing Society, and we 've earnt new carpets for the aisles and pew strips; and they were all put down by a Female Bee last Friday. And Sunday afternoon there *was* a surprise. Mr. Kingsworth began with a Sunday-school sing at two o'clock on purpose to give folks a chance to get through looking and wondering, and to calm down. You see the big west window, where the sun used to lay in afternoons in summer time before they had the blinds, and take the women's bonnets fairly off their heads with headaches, and put the men to sleep and snoring, and that lets in all the coldest little crack-draughts in the winter, had been tacked over with a big gray cloth and the new blinds kept shut. It was nice and warm, and meeting was out early before dark, and nobody mistrusted anything. Well, if those three had n't been at it these weeks back, untacking and tacking up again till it was all finished, and there, with

the sunshine just streaming straight on it and through the colors, was the handsomest picture window you ever heard of! Rael had cut out the regular pieces, the squares and circles and triangles and clover-shapes, and Leonora Kingsworth had done the real drawing work and the shading off with paints. It was some new contrivance, — a kind of prepared silk that gums right on to the glass, and is thin and fixed to let the light through, and it 's just like real colored glass. The red and the blue and the yellow and green were all in set figures, corners to the panes and crossbars and Grecian pattern and the other things, so that the old window-lights never would know they were there. And up over the top they had got a new big half-circle of glass all in one piece, and that was done in beautiful soft blue and gold color, and white for the sky and the clouds and the glory, and in the middle a white dove flying down, just as lovely and natural! You know that window comes in in the square between the side pews where ever so long ago one of the old stoves used to stand, before they had the big one down at the back under the gallery. Well, Mr. Kingsworth has put a little white marble table under the window and a white marble vase on it, and that 's where the baptizing is going to be. I believe half the children in the meeting-house were cackling up when folks came out and had time to talk it over. 'Ma! say? was *I* ever baptized? say, ma?'

"I forgot to name that they have put up weather strips, and puttied and painted over, till the sashes are all solid and tight, and there 's no wind crevices.

"There 's one thing. The whole town says it will be a match finally between Leonora Kingsworth and Rael Heybrook. It does beat all, certain, how thosé Heybrooks get along."

"I wonder she did n't wind up with, 'Why don't you get along like those Heybrooks?' That used to be the song," said Phil. "But I keep her pretty well filled up with what I do come across, and I dare say she crows now at the Heybrooks. That would just be Hannah Louisa. She never lets anybody take down her brother Flip but herself."

True enough. All Phil's smart sayings and seeings and doings were faithfully retailed, and Fellaiden was full of his uncon-

scious glory. "He 's forever at the Everidges," Mrs. Fargood reported. "France makes everything of him, though of course he 's only a boy."

Rael's lip went up when he heard her say that. Yet it had its curious effect, put by and pondered in his mind. Not jealousy of a boy of seventeen in any shape, not even as to the friendliness which France was permitting to become so established and intimate. It lessened in nothing, it came into no sort of rivalry with, the friendship she had given him. But it proved one thing, — her readiness to be a friend. What difference was there, — Flip Merriweather, Lyman, himself?

There was nothing for him ever to presume upon. She was his friend, as the Kingsworths were his friends. So and no more. But she belonged and would belong elsewhere; and one of these days he should not even be hearing about her, and his world would have a great blank in it that no beautiful thing would grow in.

It had seemed when Miss Ammah bought that Gilley house, having France Everidge here with her in the middle of her plans, that there would always be a link, always opportunities. Anything might grow or come to pass, and he could wait resolutely for whatever it should be.

But how many summers Miss Ammah had been here before she ever thought of bringing France! Next year, perhaps, it would be some strange girl. She probably knew dozens of them.

Strangely silent, too, she was in her letters. Did she understand, and know that it would never be of any use?

He could not easily say anything very directly of France himself, in his occasional writing, even if he had not felt himself tacitly put in check. She was too present in all his thoughts for mention of her to come readily by name in any sentence.

He had not thought of such a thing as asking France if he might write to herself. That asking stands for so much with the plain-hearted, primitive New England youth.

Miss Ammah thought she was so carefully doing nothing. That is a great mistake in many cases. To do nothing may be to do the strongest thing possible, especially when you stop short

after doing, however involuntarily and unintentionally, something. The locomotive stops short, met by some obstacle: the train it was drawing smoothly along cannot stop, rushes headlong, is telescoped, demolished.

And when it is a question of human hearts, the brake nice and powerful enough to adapt its checks and ensure safety there has yet to be invented.

France tortured herself with that girl at Fellaiden. She tried very hard not to hate her.

All this lovely winter time, in the glory of the snows, in the close-drawing of home and friendship that the cold and the isolation so bind and intensify, in all this beautiful work that the young farmer could not do in his busy summers, — oh, this girl was having a great deal the best of it!

She knew now very well that she wanted at least this much more of Rael Heybrook's friendship than she had got, — that it should not be possible for any other woman to have more of it!

Those were hard weeks that went by, — those next ones, four or five.

Things went on just as usual around her. There were lunches, and æsthetic little "evenings," — concerts and oratorios, — a society-play running at the Museum, and then Shakspeare at the Boston. And her mother was busy about the table she was to have at the regularly recurring Old South Fair. France had to help her and to accept invitations and make calls and see to the children's dresses for the "Chicken Germans," and coach them with their serious German, and their literature lessons for their classes at school, and be pleased when her father brought home tickets, and wanted Fran' to go to the theatres with him.

She wondered if all this was doing any good in the world.

On Sundays she went to the Epiphany, and heard words spoken as if out of heaven from the pulpit, and the rustle of silks and satins in the pews as the congregation knelt or rose; and then, when the same soft rustle and the luxurious, warm fur-odors swept down slowly out of the aisles, low snatches of talk that floated back with words of the world upon the very air that was full of but just silenced Glorias and Eleisons.

She wondered then if either, or which of them, meant anything at all.

There is not anything to record, separately, of these weeks; and yet the times when there is nothing to record are often fullest, — fullest even when it seems to be of the mere ache of emptiness.

The next thing was Miss Ammah's coming back in the latter days of February.

She reappeared at the Berkeley, glad to see France when she came in to welcome her, but constrained, almost stiffly quiet at moments, extremely brief altogether in her manner, — the fact being that she was a painfully puzzled woman.

The puzzle had been growing upon her. She had not known where she was exactly, or where any of these others were. And yet she had felt — and by Bernard Kingsworth's letter had found herself to be — "between." She did not like it so much, in fact, — such fact as this; ordinary things were easy and well enough, — as she had done in theory. She had got there quite accidentally. Now she must either stay, accepting her position and acting in it, or break away, letting things crash, and leave the pieces to pick themselves up.

What should she do about it all next summer?

And yet so long as next summer stretched itself in the comfortable future, and certain circumstances of it seemed to wait her own disposal, when she should have made up her mind, she had a vague confidence that she should feel her way, or that somebody else would decide something, or that anyhow the new season would hold some key in it to the complications of the old. She had not dreamed of next summer being taken altogether out of their hands. And now the Hetheringhams wanted her to make up her mind to go to Switzerland with them. Mountain life, absolute change, the grape cure, goats' milk, *chaises-à-porteur*, what not, — these, with a calm, strong companion, — and she would hear of none else than Miss Tredgold, — were to be salvation for the invalid.

Miss Ammah hardly believed in it, yet it seemed the waiting spot for her to move in. How could she leave them always to the reproachful doubt that she might have been the avert-

ing of their dread, should it ever confirm itself as their calamity?

When she told France Everidge, the girl's face turned perfectly white.

Then Miss Ammah knew how far her kindly mischief had reached. She smote inwardly upon her breast; she said, "Lord, help me! but what am I to do about it?" For she did not even know yet which way the mischief lay.

Girls were strange. Something of that Fellaiden experience had stayed with France, had had its growth in her, had been shaping, changing, declaring her.

Was it Bernard Kingsworth's influence, after all? And if so, was Bernard Kingsworth cheating himself, holding back now in his turn for Rael Heybrook?

How could she dare move hand or foot in such a midst as this?

France Everidge must move herself. That was what she had been saying all along.

But now here was the poor child precluded from any opportunity for moving, even if that question as to her own, Miss Ammah's, further acting in her present conscious knowledge of what she had already done, could have been decided freely. There would have been but one way for that. It must have been done with openness toward those who had nearer interest and authority. And what was there clearly to make known to them? And of what use was it to think about it now at all?

Number Nine, with the best will in the world, was in a hard, wrong corner.

For France, she was simply down from her "high place."

She knew now that she had not been strong enough to grasp the highest, when she had been lifted close beside it; that she had let go, with a half hold, with a poor, timid, half mind, neither world-weaned nor world-satisfied; and she lay bruised and hurt, and only *would* not moan.

All that is a figure. France was not down literally, but up upon her feet, lifting herself taller perhaps than usual, with that pale, proud face.

She had to take Miss Ammah's news as if it could be

nothing very much to her, as if she had hoped, expected nothing.

She had to walk away home, to take home for granted, and to find out how she was to live through the rest of these remaining weeks in town, through the gay weeks after Easter, when Helen would be back, and the pomp and vanities flare up again with brief, final flashes,'— how she should live through the summer, with nothing of that last, beautiful summer in it, and through all her life, when that beautiful time, whose gift she had put lightly by, should have drifted further and further into a scarce realized past. She could feel already how it would seem as if it had never been, and yet as if it had left nothing that evermore could be.

None the less, France was a proud, strong girl. There was too great a power of a despair in her for her to give up to this. She was too capable of a terrible wretchedness. It is the weak who give up, for whom there is no danger that they shall suffer hugely.

Putting up her hands, as it were, in a figure again, for some blind seizing of a help, what strange thing thrust itself strangely as into her grasp?

Some words she had not thought of since she had laughed carelessly when they were first uttered, — words that were absurdly variant from all her present mood. They came up, in her mind, as little, wild, green things, sown by the winds long ago, start up out of the ground after a storm. How do we know what sends words back to us with no apparent recall?

"The 's them more beans in the world," Sarell had said.

She must *do* something.

She walked fast. She was walking too fast. She should be home before she had had time to think. She turned down a parallel street to that on which they were living. She would go all the way down to Beacon Street and back again.

"*Somebody* 's to get some help," she said to herself; "or I shall die. And I won't, — I should be *ashamed* to die! There must just be that much more help in the world, somewhere!"

Was her brain playing delirious tricks, with random words, around the central, actual fact of her endurance? or had she

grasped out wildly, to find in her hold the blessed truth that grew there for her at the precipice-foot, the Christ-bearer's herb, with the brave, sweet heart of healing in it?

Was it inconceivable that it should come to her so instantly?

Instants are long; and again, nothing *is* instant, nothing comes that has not been prepared for.

Besides, it was not the worst that had befallen yet; nothing yet had happened at Fellaiden. There was only a broad blank before her, and between her and it, instead of a fair, full summer-time. She only knew now, as Miss Ammah did, all at once that it was over, — what a lurking hope there had been in the summer-time.

She was in the same world with her friend; the same grand measures of things were set in the midst of it. And lives may answer to lives as faces answer to faces in the water.

Something royal began to grow up swiftly in herself, in the low, waste place where her gladness might have been.

But where this can issue, there must be royalty of nature. Below the heights a something wonderfully rich and generous and warm, not a mere stagnant, dank, and noxious swamp.

All nature is meant to be so, and recognizes it by an instinct of the higher that remains; else why does the very feebleness of the feeble send forth its wailing in the selfsame cry, "What shall I *do?*"

It was a heavenly quarter toward which France was seeking refuge; only a noble nature would have been moved that way. And yet, there was a possible failure in it; France, like so many others, was falling into the sole mistake of saying, "There must be help somewhere, for somebody, or *I* shall die!"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FREE-WILL CHANCE.

"SHE 's jest as if she was a watchin' a custard pudd'n," said Sarell to her spouse. "Ef you take it off the fire a minute too soon, it won't set; an' ef you leave it half a minute too long, it 'll cruddle."

"What 'll cruddle?" asked Hollis obtusely.

"Nothing. I don't mean it shell. Not to spile f'r other folks. But, Hollis, you know the eave cluzzit that runs along our room an' the sett'n-room attic? I want a board took down where it 's petitioned off between."

"What fur?" Hollis inquired, as hopeful of full elucidation as usual.

"So 's 't a mouse might foller a cat round," replied his wife. "The' ain't but one other way of gitt'n int' that sett'n-room attic. An' somebody might want t' be there, athout goin' sekewichis."

"I donno 's a woman c'n do anything that *ain't* sekewichis," returned Mr. Bassett. "How *is* th' ol' man, d' y' think, Sarell?"

"I think ef he hed n't got a line out, fast t' that mile post 'f ninety-nine an' a foot, an' warn't hangin' onto it, he 'd drop," said Sarell. "But it 's wonderful how folks *can* hold on till they git there, wherever 't is. I should n't be surprised ef he clumb onto his feet agin, nor I should n't be a mite surprised ef he did n't."

The trying time of year had come; the first days of spring were maintaining their regular contest of right of way with the persistent northern winter; it was like life disputing, inch by inch, with death in a creation that has the sentence of death in itself, and for which each return to joy and vigor is like a hard-

won reprieve. Human life sympathizes in the struggle; year by year, the old, the feeble, the inadequate, yield and go down. The earth that opens to receive the seed of the new harvest opens for the seed of the resurrection in dark, deep graves.

Mother Pemble had said, "See how 't 'll be, come spring." Bernard Kingsworth had preached, "Beware of your wish, your brooding thought, your secret waiting, for what may happen." It was happening, seemingly, according to Mother Pemble's evil prayer.

Deacon Newell had had "a spell" again. It came on suddenly; he had been "taken right down," as the women said; and Sarell had had her hands full, nursing him. It all came upon her.

Perhaps the homely household simile she had used had occurred to her in respect to her own nice judgments, as much as in illustration of Mother Pemble's evident keen restlessness. There were things Sarell had fully on her mind to say to Deacon Amb; but she had no wish to precipitate them upon him, when the agitation might turn the scale of life or death, neither would she put it off till certain restoration should have hardened his heart. If the scale were *just* turned, either way, then she would speak. And into her calculations came the element first introduced among her motives by that same preaching of the doctrine of "the midst." She would fain help the poor old deacon's soul out of the mire, if it would be helped, as well as rescue Rael's dollars.

Something else softened and made her more tender, sitting and watching there the fallen, worn old face, with the lines of a lonely selfishness channelled so deep in it.

"'Most eighty years ago," she whispered to herself in her own heart, "*his mother* sat and watched him. The' was n't one o' them looks in him then, an' it would 'a broke her heart ef she 'd had a dream of 'em. Where do all the dear little babies go to when the men and women turn out, hard an' cheatin' an' mean, into the world?"

So one day when he seemed to be growing more comfortable, and had taken his beef tea with a better relish, and said to Sarell, with a kind of smile as if he had overreached somebody,

"I hain't gin up *this* time, hev I, Mis' Bassett?" Sarell answered him, quite softly and pitifully, "No, deacon, you ain't, and that 's why I want to say somethin' to you. Ain't the' anything you 'd feel better t' do, suppos'n?"

"Supposin'! Don't I tell you I ain't agoin' to? My father, he lived to be — "

"I guess ef we all lived t' be Methus'lums," Sarell interrupted, but with deliberate speech, "the' might be someth'n we could n't go back of t' set right that we 'd be glad to in the hunderd an' sixty-ninth year, an' that it would n't be any credit to us with the everlast'n' account ef we did, *then*, Deac'n Newell!"

"What ye deac'nin' me s' close fur? What d' ye think I 've got t' set right — ugh! ugh! — 'xcept this cough?"

"We 've all got someth'n, I said, an' the time to do it is when we ain't frightened, but jest think it ought t' be done. Ef we hed time t' set it right the last thing, it might do f'r other folks, when we could n't look out f'r ourselves any longer, but it would n't help *us*. You 're gitt'n well now, deac'n. The's one more chance f'r you t' do a ri' down hard, han'some thing o' clear freewill, an' the chances ain't long nor strong between here an' ninety-nine. Ev'ry day is takin' one more bite out o' the apple afore you give it up. Don't offer the bare core to the Lord. He won't take it."

The deacon looked at Sarell, startled, angrily; his lip twitched; he could not find at once a safe word to answer her with.

But looking at her he saw tears in her eyes. Something motherly in her face, this young, fresh woman's, and he an old, old man, nobody's care but his own except in the helplessness that mere humanity cares for, stirred in him some long-forgotten sense — not thought — of somebody waiting tenderly to see whether he would be a good child again or not.

He had never seen Sarell like that before.

"*You* ain't expear'nced religion," he said half defiantly, half wonderingly. "What do you talk about the Lord fur?"

"P'raps because the Lord hes ways t' talk t' all of us, ef it ain't expeeriunce," said Sarell with a strange, sweet dignity. "Ef I hed a boy o' my own," she went on, something like Mary's Magnificat lighting her face with a hope too pure and

brave to be shy of that old man lying there to be saved, "I'd pray that ef he lived t' be eighty he might never do a mean thing; or ef he did, not realizin', that he 'd repent of his own accord, so 's t' be grander 'n ef he hed n't hed to. I was kinder thinkin' 'bout *your mother*, Deac'n Amb!"

The old man answered not a word. Sarell straightened the bedclothes, turned the fresh sheet smoothly under his chin, and went away.

"She did n't know what had possessed her," she told Hollis, "or finally what she *had* said." "It did n't half seem as ef 't was myself," she declared. And then she put her capable, strong hands on Hollis's shoulders, and laid her bright, domineering head against his breast an instant, with a tender little sob.

"Sho! sho!" said Hollis, with pleased, indulgent soothing, stroking her hair. "It 's all right, little girl! It alwers is all right when you take hold, you know. I 'll resk it."

Deacon Amb lay awake that night and thought a good deal about his mother.

She had died when he was yet a small boy, so that his remembrances of her were few. But they stood forth in vivid points on the far background of that first childhood of his that was shut up and sealed at ten years old, when his stepmother, "a real calc'latin', drivin' woman," came to take possession of things, himself included as a thing that could run errands, and pick up chips, and turn the churn if "an eye was had on him," from first daylight till the work was done on churning days. The second Mrs. Newell was in every respect an helpmeet to her husband, from whom Amb inherited that side of his character which was henceforth most carefully nurtured and developed.

But Uncle Amb remembered to-night the different teachings of a pale, soft-speaking woman, whose eyes looked upon him again out of that morning haze now that he turned toward them with his tardy recollection. They had not looked upon him so for many a hard, sordid year, in which he had had his back upon that old time. Had they been waiting, — waiting all the while with that sad patience?

He remembered a day when he had come home from school with another boy's knife that he had picked up in the playground. He had been kept in, and so had found it after all the rest were gone. His father never gave him knives.

He went straight to his mother to show it to her. He remembered just how he had opened and shut it, and made her look at the four blades. It was "a prime knife" he told her. And then he remembered, — why did all this come up in such a keen re-living now? — just how her voice had sounded; it sounded now through the intervening silences and confusions as the eyes looked out of the dimness, saying, "Ambrose, you should n't look too long at a thing that is n't yourn."

He knew just how he had argued, — little shortsighted fool, supposing she could not see any further than he showed her, — that there had n't been anybody there, and he did n't know — certain true — whose it was, and it was his now he had found it, and school did n't keep till Monday anyway, and he could have it till then.

"Ambrose!" she had said to him again, "don't keep a thing *overnight*, if you can help it, that you know ain't yourn."

Overnight. Should he have his mother's eye to meet in the morning if he did keep anything overnight, the long night that might drop unawares?

He had n't meant to keep anything overnight. He had only meant — as he had pleaded for the knife — to keep it a little while, to play with it just a little, then he would go and find the other boy and give it back.

"Ambrose!" he heard the soft voice say, with the tender eyes still looking down at him, "it 's growing dark already. It *will* be overnight if you don't go right off now."

In the dozing half-sleep after that, into which he fell and lay till morning, those words kept on sounding over and over to him in that strange, sweet way: "Don't keep it overnight. It will be overnight, Ambrose, if you don't go right off now."

Until, when the early stir in the house and some quick tone of Sarell's broke up, without his quite knowing what had done it, his imperfect slumber, and then it seemed to him in the instant of his waking, that he was roused by that other sentence,

sharply spoken, "The's one more chance, Deac'n Amb, t' do it of clear freewill!"

Sarell came in and gave him some beef tea. Then she fixed up his pillows and smoothed everything comfortably, and left him so again, and as if all ministration were withdrawn save such as cared in its turn for the weak old body, lest by its losing needful rest might be lost the one more chance, there came a peaceful hush upon him, and he slipped off into a calm morning nap with neither dreams nor voices. He woke when the sun was shining across into the bedroom from the south sitting-room window in the jog.

He felt a good deal better, — yes, he thought he could get up to-day.

"No more 'n y' did yist'day. Only int' th' elber-chair," Sarell commanded, "but I 'll fix a swing-board f'r y'r feet, an' then y' c'n be wropped up an' rolled where y' c'n see out the winder; or over int' the keep'n-room finally, ef y' like. But y' don't tetch y'r feet to the carpet, no-way. The's draughts along the floors, alwers."

"I want t' git t' my papers," said the deacon.

"Don'no," said Sarell, looking at him a little anxiously. Something, she was not sure what, had changed the old man. Face and tone were different; not sicker or weaker, perhaps, but different. They were as if something new — or old — had been called up in him, or rather as if he were called away to it. He forgot his furtiveness, his keenness, that had always marked his manner in all allusion or approach to his affairs or his "dockyments." He said so simply to her, as if she had known all about them and him, "I want t' git t' my papers."

"I don'no," she repeated.

Then he lifted his eyes at her impatiently. "Don'no,— don'-no?" he echoed. "What 's all that fur? Ain't I a gitt'n better?"

"Yes," said Sarell stoutly. "But the's two of 'em, all the same."

"Two what?"

"Don'noes. I don'no 's you oughter; an' I don'no 's I oughter take my own jedgment about it — either way."

"You took yer own jedgment p'utty spry, yist'day."

"I 'm the same mind to-day. But I 've got both sides o' you to think on, too." And Sarell beat a retreat, with an empty pitcher she had picked up, into the kitchen.

"He *thinks* so," she said to herself, in a noiseless way of speech she had with lips and breath, as she stood there considering, the pitcher still between her hands. "An' whatever he does, it 'll stand accordin'. An' I ain't told no lie, either. He *is* better; but better ain't well. It 's high time he did it, ef that 's what he means; an' that lays between him 'n the Lord, — *I* can't regg'late it. But t' let him overdo,— delib'rit,— how sh'd I ever be sure he *might n't* 'a ben gitt'n well?"

Sarell was not exactly a prayerful woman; but there was a sense of something that might enlighten and direct, as she ejaculated in the same noiseless fashion, with a knot in her eyebrows and giving a downward jerk to the tight-clasped pitcher, "I *hope* I ain't got this fur t' lose my way in th' dark at the very wind-up!"

She went back, pitcher and all.

"See here, Sarell," said the old man, "I b'lieve in *you*. Here 's my keys. Go to my seckerterry —"

"No, I can't!" broke in Sarell, with emphasis. "I would n't tetch them keys f'r a farm. I 'd sooner fetch the seckerterry t' you!"

"I 've got somethin' t' do,— an' you 've got t' help me," said the deacon slowly. "I can't git in there myself. I can't git up. I 've tried. An' it can't wait — overnight,— overnight,— because — you see — I 'm gitt'n well, I 'm mendin'; you said so; an' I 've got to do it — on *the mendin' hand*."

The poor old man's breath was short; he had been drawing on his stockings, and trying to get out of bed by himself. Sarell set down the pitcher hastily, and came to him.

"You 've jest got t' keep still awhile," she said, "an' when you 're rested, an' hev hed y'r brandy 'n water, an' some more beef tea, you shall try bein' got up int' th' elber-chair; an' ef that works we 'll jest roll y' *in* t' the seckerterry. It 's good 'n warm all the way; an' I don't persume 't 'll hurt ye. But don't you go t' strainin'." When Sarell pronounced "you" with three letters it was equivalent to quiet italics.

The deacon's face lighted up, and a gleam of its old malice played across it.

"Mother Pemble 'll be dreadful tickled t' see me, won't she, Mis' Bassett?"

After the brandy and water and the beef tea, the deacon "guessed he could walk, after all." Sarell knew better.

Mother Pemble's latch was up and the door ajar. She had it left so a good deal in these days that there was "sickness in the house." When she wanted it shut she could "speak." When Mother Pemble "spoke," it was "like pursin' a hole with an eyelot-pin," Sarell said; and she made haste to shut her up, in double sense.

No doubt she was "dreadful tickled" to see Deacon Amb come rolling in on casters.

"Here I be, Mother Pemble," he said, in a voice whose weakness cracked with glee, "a ridin' in with my coch 'n span. S'pose y' thought I 'd be ridin' off, b' this time, 'n th' narrer one-hoss team? Ain't agoin' t' be tucked up 'n green bedclo'es *jest* yit, Mother Pem!"

If it was pleasure at his so far recovery that lit Mother Pemble's eyes, a cloud of anxiety swiftly rose up in her face, covering that expression, which might in its turn refer to the limit of it. But Sarell Bassett had no belief that it did.

The anxious look followed the little cortege across the room, and when the big chair was wheeled close up in front of the old secretary Mother Pemble's head was lifted forward from her pillow, and Sarell told Hollis afterward that "ef the' was ever *jump* enough in a woman's eyes t' fetch her whole body after it, the' was in the ol' woman's then. An' when th' whole jump hes t' be *kep'* t' the eyes, I sh'd think," she said, "'twould be wuss 'n the noorologer. She 's got more indoorunce t' the end th'n would 'a saved her soul, 'n half a dozen more o' th' same bigness, long ago!"

"Would old Amb take 'n carry off them papers, 't the last minute, before her eyes?" was Mother Pemble's inward alarmed misgiving. She had never counted, in all the calculation and price-paying of those years, on such a simple thing as that.

Well, he would n't do it; sick, dying, he could n't: that had been all her supposition, which had hardly needed to state itself.

He had his bunch of keys in his hand. "That one," he told Sarell; and Sarell took it and put it in the keyhole. He turned it himself; then he rolled back the fluted doors, after which he lay back in his chair, tired, to take his breath.

Sarell sent a glance from under sidewise lashes across the footboard of the bedstead as she stood, and saw Mother Pemble independent of her pillows by at least two inches' space, her lips apart,— two devils, fear and expectancy, fighting in her eyes.

"That creetur knows as well as he dooes ev'ry individooil thing the' is here," was Sarell's mental comment, as she stood, moveless, waiting orders.

"That middle drawer," said the deacon feebly, pointing.

Sarell opened it.

"Gi' me them papers," said the old man.

Sarell took them out, and put them into his hand; then the shallow drawer was empty.

"Shet it up; that 'll do," said Deacon Amb. "Now — look in the — deep right-hand pigeon-hole — under the led,— it slides,— an' gi' me— "

There was a just perceptible movement in the bed behind. Mother Pemble was straight up when Sarell drifted a second look over upon her; and the two devils in her eyes were flashing naked swords.

"I was go'n t' say — my long luther wallet," said the old man, in a dreamy, broken way. "But never. mind, — I'm kinder sleepy; — guess it 's the brandy. Shet it up — come agin to-morrer." His head dropped back upon the cushioned chair-top; his lips dropped in upon his toothless jaws; his jaw dropped down a little. The poor old man was very pale.

They rolled him out again, — the three folded papers lying under his half-relaxed fingers.

In Mother Pemble's eyes, as they followed him forth across her room, — she had noiselessly settled herself back into her place again,— there were two devils dancing now, expectancy and triumph.

"What beautiful nusses we air!" she sneered. She had to say something, upon the long breath of her relief.

Sarell interpreted the long breath; the words upon it fell to ground without her heeding. She put the papers and the keys under the old man's pillow, and would not have him left alone again.

That afternoon there was a fresh flicker of the candle. The deacon called Sarell, made her bring pen and ink, and feebly, himself, drew forth the documents.

"I'm goin' t' do it o' freewill," he said. "I'm gitt'n better, —ain't I?"

"You 're gitt'n better ev'ry minute, deac'n," answered Sarell bravely; for she was telling the soul-truth,— giving him that last chance. Standing in the midst, there, she was glad.

"Yes. The three days o' grace ain't run out. 'T ain't pertested. Piller me up, Sarell."

But Sarell called Hollis. She would not have him go "off the home-piece," to-day. Hollis sat up on the bed behind the pillows, and held his stout shoulders back to back against the deacon's. Care'line was in the keeping-room, gently rocking in her chair. "When the 's anything f'r me t' do, le' me know," was her standing order to Sarell. What the deacon signed — or sighed — away, meantime, was matter of ignorant apathy to her.

The deacon selected and turned over, with trembling fingers, the mortgage-deed. He took the pen in his hand, moved it slowly along in air above the three lines he had written upon it before, passed it in like manner over the signature, and then drew a wavering but deliberate line beneath his name. "Now, you two must witness," he said. "But — fust — you take the pen, Sarell, an' write — on them other two — what I tell ye."

Sarell took the pen, the two other folded papers which the deacon feebly put toward her, and the atlas that she had laid for him on which to write.

"For value received —"

"'Ceived," said Sarell, writing.

"I hereby make over and transfer —"

Sarell's pen scratched laboriously. "Fer," she said, in about a minute.

"The herein certificates — "

"Kits," pronounced Sarell in a minute more; but she had been to school and to spelling-bees, and, it being a five-syllable word and of importance, she had orthographized correctly; although, as we have had opportunity for observing, she used the alphabet with a somewhat free hand for ordinary convenience.

"To Israel Welcome Heybrook."

That name went down as if it had been written some time of a habit.

"Now put the same — same way on t' other," and he watched her while she did it, kneeling down beside his bed, and leaning the old atlas against it.

"Now read it all over, both on 'em."

Sarell read the words twice.

"Gi' me the pen."

She held the book for him, and placed the papers successively. He signed his name to each indorsement.

"Now take this," the mortgage deed, "an' put 'Witnessed' under what I've wrote, t' the left hand. I'm a sight better, Sarell, 'n I was this mornin'!"

"You're an *everlastin'* sight better, Deacon. You're most a real well man." And Sarell looked at him with that yearning, motherly look, as if she had saved, not a man so much as a child, out of some long, strange danger.

"But I don't care," he said. "I don't take nothin' back. The's more 't I c'n hev whole comfort in now, 'f I git — when I git — well. An' *when* I don't — There, put y'r two names down there, you 'n Hollis, 'n then — " The deacon stopped.

"You're doin' too much, Deac'n Amb," put in Hollis, streaking away something across his cheeks with the biggest knuckle of his right hand, as he let the old man gently down with his pillows, and came round to take the pen from his wife. "You jest keep quiet, 'n we 'll 'tend t' ev'rything, Sarell 'n I."

And Sarell shone up at the honest fellow through two bright blue pools of water and sunshine, as she gave him up her place, and went to bring the deacon's flaxseed lemonade.

After that, the deacon lay awhile quite still, with his hand over the three folded papers which Sarell had placed together

on the counterpane before him. Then he said, — Hollis had withdrawn, — "Tell Mr. Bassett t' hitch up, 'n drive over t' Hawksb'ry, an' see Squire Putt'nham, an' git him to go right into Deane an' see this recorded. '*Recorded*,' tell him. Squire Putt'nham 'll know; 'n then to-morrow git word t' Welcome 'n Isril, 'n say 't I want t' see 'em. I sha' n't git round there myself, 'n these east winds, f'r a spell, mebbe. An' I kinder want t' see it thriew."

Sarell went and shut the bedroom door. "Deac'n," she said softly and quietly, as she returned, "I *don't* want t' wear y' out, but y' said someth'n 'bout '*more*.' Had n't y' better le' me make some kind o' memmirander 'v whatever else the' is?"

"What fur?" the deacon demanded, with some strength of sharpness, "when I 'm a gitt'n well?"

"Folks git well faster when th' ain't nothing t' go askew 'f they did n't," said Sarell.

The deacon made no haste to answer. "Well," said he at last, prolonging upon the word the suspense during which perhaps the suggestion was setting itself in rather a persuasive light to him, in view of his not being able at present to handle over the leather wallet. "Well, put it down, 'f ye want to. 'T won't take long."

Sarell got a piece of paper, and dipped the pen.

"Four 'nited States five hunder' dollar five p' cents."

"'Cents,'" quoted Sarell, not dropping her inflection. "What?"

"Bon's, course. 'nited States Bon's."

"Bon's," repeated Sarell with solid emphasis, notwithstanding the dropped "d" on the good solid word.

"Four State o' New Hampshire five hunder' dollar six p' cents."

"Cents, bon's," reiterated the scribe.

"An' two thous'n dollar" — he lowered his voice — "Hub an' Tire Railroad bon's, seb'n p' cent. All good f'r cash 'r inves'ments, ary one. Got things snugged up jest in time. Don't feel much like speck'latin', 'r hevin' t' haul in neither, 'mejutly."

The deacon actually chuckled. The inventory of his posses-

sions sounded good to him, was relishing upon his lips. The old proverb of the ruling passion has its foundation in the law of life. Strength comes, when it will come for nothing else, for what a human being has always been strongest toward.

"Now, Mis' Bassett," he said, as she silently folded up the paper and looked round for a place to put it in, "You know more 'n my wife, or Mother Pemble either. Hold your tongue."

Sarell held her tongue, as surest sign she could continue to do it. She came, still in silence, to the head of the bed, lifted the corner of the feather tick, and with a big pin from her side fastened the memorandum to the under mattress.

"What 's that?" asked the deacon.

"What I 've got noth'n t' say about," she answered. "It 's there, 'long o' your keys. Now I 'll go tell Hollis. The arrant, I mean." And she hastened off to find her husband in the barn. As she went, she remarked to herself in the free air, with a return of her natural spirit and quaintness, "Ef I did n't, — more 'n Care'line, — I *would* kerwumpuss; but Mis' *Pemble*, what she don' know ain't there."

CHAPTER XLIII.

MOTHER PEMBLE'S ULTIMATUM.

"He won't come agin to-morrer, — n'r nex' day," said Mother Pemble to herself.

She kept quiet all that afternoon. She put her latch down, and went to sleep. Mother Pemble took good care of herself, and there were hours in the twenty-four that were available to her, when she had so redeemed them beforehand.

"The' wa'nt nothin' in that middle drawer but the morgidge 'n them share stiffikits. Them 's nothin' t' me. The rest 's all in the ol' luther wallet; an' praise be t' natur, Amb hankers back t' the cash, alwers, — sure 's death. I knew he 'd claw it in agin, give him time. But, land! ef he *hed n't* hed time! I do dispise speck'latin' — tell it 's thriew with sat's-fact'ry. — Thriew with? Yes, I guess Amb's thriew with it now — poor ol' soul! Ef he hed n't ben Ambrose Newell, I should n't 'a ben —"

Yes, she would; and she knew it. She would have been Harriet Pemble, all the same; there might only have been an easier way for her to be. It was the nearest — that unfinished sentence in her mind — by which she came to any touch of pity or self-excusing, as she thought these things all over, lying in the twilight, waiting for her supper, with the doors open through to where Ambrose lay, waiting, — for to-morrow.

Between four and five o'clock, while Hollis was gone to Hawksbury, he had had a "weak spell" again. He was better now; but they had only been able to give him the brandy and the strong beef tea at intervals; he could not take any ordinary form of nourishment. Supper-time came, and went by; the tray was carried into Mother's Pemble's room, and brought out again;

the dishes were washed up in the kitchen. Hollis Bassett was to sit up by the deacon to-night.

Sarell lay down upon the keeping-room lounge. It was impossible for her to sleep. She had done a great part of what she had come here to do, but there was no triumph in it. She began to be pitiful and sorry in her heart, instead of hard and relentless, toward such wretched meanness and wrong; not bearing to feel that it was human nature, — the nature that is born, every day, into mothers' arms, into the world. Confronted with it, she would find herself as quick and keen to detect, as prompt to scathe and give battle against, as ever; but it troubled her now that it should be there for her to confront. The time had gone by when she had thought with exultation of out-manœuvring Mother Pemble, and "facing her down" with some clever *coup* of discovery. Now she had come to it, this did not look beautiful to her. She had found something more beautiful, — to discover the last good, instead of the last evil, in a fellow-creature, and to lay hold of that.

"I would n't 'a thought," she said to herself, "I 'd ever 'a felt 's ef I c'd set by Deac'n Amb; but 'pears t' me I actially could. Ef that little mite o' decency in him 'd only grow up. It 's like the baby 'v him, th't wa'n't never fairly raised. But the' won't be time now, — 'n this world. Th' ol' man 'v him 's got t' die an' be buried; 'n ef the' is any beginning agin, he 'll hev t' start awf'l weak. Them things is turr'ble strange, — how d' we know? — We start awf'l weak here, th' best 'v us; what ef we don't reck'lect what we 've starved 'n kep' down somewers else? What 'f this world 's a kind 'v 'n ondecided hell, 'n we 've made th' ev'l sperrits of us, — th' ol' men 'n th' ol' women, — where we was tried afore? What sh'd we be put here *t' be saved* fur, 'f we ain't got something further back t' be saved from? — An' would n't it be awful, ef while we was a dealin' with the dev'ls 'v one another, we sh'd be a chokin' out the feeble little sefferin' angils?"

The tall clock in the corner stirred with the coming of the hour. In three minutes it would strike. Sarell could not remember whether it had struck ten or eleven, last. She had been too busy to think about the time; and the room had been dark when she lay down here half an hour ago.

The three minutes went ticking by, so slowly. The watched minutes are longer than the unreckoned hours. When the first stroke of the hammer fell, it came as something that had been waited for until given up. Sarell sat upright. Then she counted — two, — three, — and on — to twelve.

Care'line was asleep in the little parlor-bedroom, to which a door led from diagonally opposite the deacon's, the latter being at the back corner, at right angles to the entrance to the kitchen. Opposite the kitchen door was an east window where the keeping-room projected from the front building; between this window and the deacon's door the lounge stood. Beyond the east window was the passage to Mother Pemble's room, running past the great front chimney, against which the press-closet was divided off from it. Between the front chimney and the parlor-bedroom was the space occupied by the stairway from Mother Pemble's room into the little attic. Exactly across the keeping-room from this, again, started the other ascent, that turned around the kitchen chimney, and went up to Sarell's chamber.

This geography is needful.

Sarell could hear Hollis gently snoring in his chair. She had known he would go to sleep; therefore, though she let him have his way, supposing he was saving her night's rest, she had quietly remained here when he thought she had gone away up stairs.

The midnight stillness spread again where the deep, ringing sounds had broken it, as a water-surface heals and levels. Hollis's snoring ceased. The whirr and striking of the clock had penetrated his slumber, and then the very fall of silence had roused him up. He moved in his chair, and stretched his arms. Sarell knew he would keep awake a while now.

She had just leaned softly back upon the big down cushion, thinking that she ought to try and get a nap herself, when a slight, distinct sound startled her,— a dull, metallic clash, like the dropping of a bunch of keys. It was directly overhead, upon the floor of that little keeping-room attic. There was no access to the attic but through Mother Pemble's room, or through the eave-closet by means of the detached partition boards.

Mother Pemble's door was fast, and the cord was drawn across the corner of the passage without, to the door-knob of the press behind her chimney. Whatever might be done within, Sarell had always made sure of late that there was no emerging; and infuriated as the old lady might be, the fact of her imprisonment was something of which she could admit no consciousness.

Sarell had not as yet availed herself of the secret passage she had arranged; she had not supposed that Mother Pemble really mounted, herself, to the attic; she had only been pretty certain that she crept about, when the way was clear, in the lower rooms, and even — as indicated by Doctor Fargood's story — out beyond the doors. She had stopped for the present this possibility of prowling, or of any conveying away; for she was convinced that the object of this long waiting and working was nothing short of seizing or making a chance, at the right moment, for "executing in her own wrong," upon Deacon Newell's negotiable property. Also that she had found access, in some way, to the place where it was deposited. Mother Pemble and the "old seckerterry" had been locked up too long together, not to be kept locked now.

But Sarell had been feeling that things could not always be so shut up and under control. Spring was approaching; weather when doors could not all be fastened at night, or porches disused and locked, and the keys kept back without inquiry. A little further on than spring, she knew of a time when her vigilance must needs be suspended. The thought of different, sweet watch was making her hate this; and yet this must not be abandoned, for right and friendship's sake. She had felt that she must soon manage to bring matters to a crisis, — to leave some liberty that would be taken advantage of, and then, by her own private command of the position, come literally down upon Mother Pemble, or where Mother Pemble ought to be, and "face her out with it" in such a manner as to take away from her altogether the shield and cover of her supposed incapability.

"An' when I'm downright sure of what I've got to go upon, — an' she knows it, an' can't deny it, — she's got to give that

room up vol'nterry t' th' deac'n, an' git well, an' stan' li'ble t' the same accountability 's the rest 'v us; an' leave Uncle Amb, an' his conscience, an' the things on it, an' his locks 'n keys, an' the things under 'em, t' ther own look-out f'r each other 't the end 'v the chapter. 'R else, I 'll turn it all over t' the deac'n himself, 'n let him tutor her."

But now, even that would be distasteful. She was glad she had not got it to do. Things were straightening themselves. Spring days and the open house and the new summer-time, tying and blessing Sarell's hands, might come: before any of them, that would have come which would settle all. A few days more, and the old secretary would have given up its secrets; it might stand unlocked. Mother Pemble might get upon her feet at her pleasure. The Tempter would have flouted her in the face with the years of her life that she had rendered up a sacrifice beforehand, and left her with her empty hands.

Rael and his father would have their rights to-morrow; the memorandum of all the rest lay there with the deacon's keys, under his head. Nothing could be removed, so as not easily to be found again; any such attempt would be a folly.

Only, Mother Pemble did not know of the memorandum.

And now, what was she doing, what had she done, stealing round up stairs there, with her bunches of keys?

At this moment, when she felt that everything was absolutely safe, Sarell simply wished that she could have put herself between the miserable old woman and her shame.

She listened. There was a creaking sound — she heard it twice; but it was a slow creak, that might have been a door or a blind straining in the March wind, though she was persuaded it was Mother Pemble's foot upon the floor above. She waited to hear it upon the staircase, but there is a way of treading on a creaking stair that defeats it. One has only to take it upon the edge, bearing weight exactly upon the upright; and with hands and feet, and no rustling garments, a slight, wiry woman may pass over such a stairway like a cat.

Not a sound told whether anybody had descended or not. But in a very few minutes, Mother Pemble coughed comfortably and precisely in her own room.

Sarell was wise enough not to hurry. She sat a quarter of an hour upon the lounge, resting quietly back upon the cushion. Then she rose softly, looked in at the deacon's door, saw Hollis giving him his brandy at the right time, and then turned back and walked over to the open passageway, slipped the loop of line from the press-room door, and knocked on Mother Pemble's.

Half a minute of silence, then she knocked again. A few seconds more, and Mother Pemble answered tremulously, with a just-awakened tone, "Care'line, is that you?"

"No, Missis Pemble. It 's me — Sarell. Undo the latch; I 've got someth'n t' tell you."

The latch went up. As Sarell entered, Mother Pemble turned her voice toward her in the darkness. "Is it Ambrose?" she asked, with the conventional pathos. "Is he gone, poor soul?"

"No, ma'am, not yet," Sarell said very steadily. "I 'll light y'r candle." And she made her way across to the bedside, struck a match, and lit the home-made "mould."

Mother Pemble looked at her eagerly, expectantly. In that quarter of an hour she had been satisfied that nobody had heard the drop of her keys — at any rate, to understand and place the sound.

"Missis Pemble," said Mrs. Bassett, "you 've ben up. Did y' want anything?" She spoke as if quite of course, as if Mother Pemble usually got up when she wanted anything, like other people.

But Mother Pemble was as sharp and cool as she.

"You 've ben runnin' o' that notion a good while, Mis' Bassett. Prewve it."

Sarell looked round the room in the dim light. She glanced at each point in turn; last of all, toward the secretary. Her eyes, in passing round, took note that the attic-stairway door was just — not — latched. But she made no comment upon that.

Out of the secretary-front hung an inch of worn green string. She knew very well it had not hung so when they closed it that day before dinner. But she said nothing about that.

Round by the bed again, she saw the square walnut chest

under the north window with its lid caught upon the hasp. She pointed to it.

"You 've ben up, an' at that chist," she said.

"Y'r an evyl-mindid persecutor, Sarell Bassett," said Mother Pemble. "That 's ben so, I don' know how long. Sence las' time Care'line went to 't f'r me. She never shets things."

"It 's ben so f'r less th'n half an hour. You lie, Missis Pemble." Sarell spoke just as quietly, as smoothly, as if she had said, "You 're right, Mrs. Pemble."

Mother Pemble began to cry. "I lie here," she sobbed and whimpered, "an' you stan' over me, an' ensult me; 'n what ef I *could* crawl that fur, 'm I bound t' let the whole house know? Ef I 'd *ben* a little mite better, an' hed some hopes 'v myself th't I kep' t' myself, for fear 'v disappintin' some folks an' bein' put upon be others, would ye grudge it t' me, Sarell? Ef y hed a girl o' y'r own, you 'd know what 't was t' want t' do f'r her, an' save f'r her, I guess," said the wily old woman.

"Because ther's sech reas'ns an' feelin's in the world, it 's no sign you 've got 'em," Sarell returned, possessing her soul in firmness.

Mother Pemble was determined to be confidential, to the extreme of candor.

"I 'd jest as lives tell y' as not," she said. "Now, 't Ambrose — well, poor soul, never mind him now. I *was* gitt'n incouridged, an' in hopes t' tell y' all some day; an' I was doin' the best I could t' help myself. But I ain't near so strong as I was."

"Dare say y' was, an' dare say y' ain't," returned Sarell, too utterly contemptuous to seem so, or to move a line of her countenance, and speaking almost in a monotone. "Don't git so free t' the strengthenin' things, — milk-pitchers an' custard-pies an' new-laid eggs an' blackberry corjil; don't hev s' much fresh air; hev t' depend on the rubbin' an' the jimnastys. But y' *might*, Missis Pemble. Y' might be free to all. *I* don't want t' coop y' up, nor keep y' down. Ef ye 'll jest come out as a able-bodied, *responsible* woman, y're 's free t' the eggs an' the milk an' the pies an' the corjil an' the Lord's sunshine 's the rest 'v us. An' the same things we *ain't* free to, *you* ain't; an'

it 's all aboveboard." Only the accented words varied in tone from the cool, perfectly quiet monotony of the speech.

Mrs. Pemble answered nothing. She pretended to be too abused and indignant. She fixed her eyes upon Sarell, as if they had been the eyes of an accusing angel. But she was secretly calculating how much or how little Sarell might know.

"I 've jest come t' tell you this," resumed Sarell. "The deac'n he give me a memirander, yist'day, 'v all the money-papers he left there in that seckerterry; an' as I was the last one there *with him*, I feel accountable. I sh'll come back here in another half hour, Missis Pemble, with 's many streps o' paper with Sarell Bassett writ acrost 'em 's the's keyholes in that article 'v furnicher; an' a strep o' paper 'll be pasted over ev'ry soliterry keyhole. An' nothin' more c'n be took out, an' nothin' more *c'n be put in*. I might find y' out, Missis Pemble; but you 'd a grea' deal better find yr'self out. An' I 'd a sight ruther y' would!"

Sarell put her hand out, as she spoke, to the latch-cord, and detached it from the hook in the table. She rolled it over her fingers into a little skein, and went and hung it to a nail high up on the wall. "I 'll fix it f'r ye when I come back, Missis Pemble. I 'm sorry t' disturb ye, but this is got t' be attended to. I 'll give ye a half hour; an' the' shan't *nothin'* enterrupt ye." She spoke very politely.

She had reached the door, and held it in her hand, when something did interrupt them both. They both heard a quick, heavy step cross the keeping-room, and run up a few stairs upon the other side.

"Sarell! Sarell!" called Hollis, in a hoarsely articulated whisper. "Don't be scar't, but come quick. The's a change!"

Sarell slid through the door, and shut it hastily; but even then she remembered to pass the knot of the strong fastening line around the press-room knob again.

Mother Pemble remained motionless a minute or two. "It 's come," she said, and then hushed herself breathlessly, as if to hear whether a soul took flight.

"Ef he hed n't a ben Ambrose Newell, 'n ef he would n't a made a white slave o' me, an' wore me out 'n left Care'line

with nobody t' see after her — " she said, and then left off again.

She heard Sarell go in and call Care'line ; then all the house was very quiet. The door at the end of the passage into the keeping-room was shut.

She grew calm. It was what she had known must happen — what she had looked for. Why should she be thrown out of her self-possession now ?

" She can't *prewve* nothin', an' she shan't *find* nothin'. I ain't held out these seven year t' give in now. *I'll lay!*" That was Mother Pemble's ultimatum.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SARELL GIVES ODDS AND COMES OUT EVEN.

Deacon Ambrose Newell died at four in the morning.

There were no last words upon his lips. The last that he had spoken had been two hours before, when a slight revival gave back a flitting memory of the last things in his mind. He died as he had lived, among his money cares. Thanks only to Sarell that he had made friends of the Mammon in a little at the end.

"Fetch Welcome," he had said; "an' Isril. Tell 'em — it 's twe—nty years too soon — I alwers meant — ef I was prospered — but I can't talk. She 's got 'em. She done it. It 's all right. Only, I 'm feared I ain't goin' t' live my time out. Sarell! I did it in the *freewill chance*, y' know? My keys, my papers, — give Welcome — "

Yes. "Give Welcome" were the last words; and perhaps there were invisible ones ready to give welcome even to the poor, starved, dwindled remnant in him that had never grown up out of babyhood, but that was escaping now, when all that he had lived consciously was dropping down into the dust.

It was six o'clock when Sarell came back into Mother Pemble's room. Care'line was there now, sitting in the rocking chair. She had shed a few easy, comfortable tears, — that duty was disposed of, — and she was ready for the calm part of her affliction. For its central importance also. She had on a black afternoon gown, her collar was pinned straight, and a clean pocket-handkerchief lay on her broad lap. The neighbors, from the Centre and circumference, would be pouring in. The house would be full and busy all day long.

Welcome and Israel would be here soon probably: Hollis had gone over for them. He had offered to take home on his way, the old wife who had been fetched at daylight, who was

always fetched — the ghostly word suits well — when there were details of death and burial in a house. But Mrs. Streakham had thanked him in a surprised way, as one who knew no better. "The'd be enough t' do," she said; and settled herself to preside over the whole grim holiday.

She came and looked in at Mother Pemble's doorway now. "Had n't I best light a fire in the front parlor, Widder Newell?" she asked, giving Care'line her title, as an eager flatterer might a new-made lord. "The 'll be lots o' comp'ny, an' y' won't want to see 'em all in here."

"Oh, jest as you think best, — you 'n Sarell," Care'line answered, in a way that would have been more significant of chief-mournerhood if she had not, in the sense of leaving everything to others, been a chief mourner all her life.

But we do not care for these things. The result concerns us, — that in a little while Care'line was sitting in state in the front parlor, and Mother Pemble was likely at last to get her room to herself again.

Sarell had quietly put her eleven bits of paper across the keyholes of the six drawers under the desk, the four high up above it, and the grooved slide-doors between, of the old secretary. It was her own device; she had never heard of sealed drawers and doors before. When Care'line limply asked her what for, she had just said, "While nobody hes any business with the keys, I thought mebbe 't would be proper. Mr. Heybrook 'll see to it by an' by."

"*Oh*, how much he did think o' them keys!" sighed Widder Newell, taking the word simply as a cue to her own *rôle*.

"Don't be a fool, Care'line!" snapped Mother Pemble from the bed. Sarell liked her a little better for her non-pretence of grief. But the thing Mother Pemble never could have any patience with in her daughter — all the same that for her own ends she would not really have had it otherwise just now — was that her listlessness reached even to the money and the keys.

When Care'line went out, Sarell had stopped to rearrange Mother Pemble's latch-cord, and with some pity in her heart for the really tired, pale face, had said, "I 'll bring you some breakfast, Missis Pemble, an' then, I s'pose you 'll take a nap."

"Ain't likely t' be much nappin' 'tween you 'n me," muttered Mother Pemble, as Mrs. Bassett disappeared.

When Welcome Heybrook and his son came, her latch was down. Nobody demurred at that. There was no need of going in at present.

Sarell met the two in her bright, sweet kitchen, that she meant to have to herself and Hollis to-day, though people were offering to "cook or to wash up or anything." "I c'n cook, 'n the' ain't no need t' wash up," she had answered proudly.

She gave Mr. Heybrook the package of papers, the bunch of keys, and the slip of written memorandum. "He died with his mind at rest," was all her explanation. "An' now it 's off *my* mind. You 'll take charge."

Old Welcome was half bewildered, but Israel comprehended something. Father and son glanced together at the outside of the documents, as the former held them in his hands. Then the old man closed his fingers over them, and Israel turned away. Neither of them would be eager, in this first moment, to look further into his own benefit. Welcome moved toward the keeping-room. It seemed as if he must go to Ambrose first, before he could take to himself what Ambrose, lying there so empty-handed now, had left behind for him.

Israel turned round to Sarell. "You 're a noble, good woman, Sarell," he said warmly, taking her hand, "and you will have your reward."

"I thought he needed seein' to, Rael," Sarell said, with the first tremble in her voice that had been so calm and strong all the way through, "or I would n't never 'a left y'r mother."

And then Israel comprehended still more. "That was it, then, all the time, when we were thinking you were in a hurry to please yourself? And you 've done it for us, — what I 'd never have asked for, if it had never been done! Sarell, I 'm ashamed," said the proud fellow.

Sarell's face quivered all over. "'T wa' n't th't I should n't 'v got merried all the same, some time," she said loyally. "But it looked hard jest then, t' be takin' my own way, 'n walkin' pride. Only, I see 't was time somebody was here, f 'r a number o' things," she ended commonplacely, and then sat down in a chair

beside her white, scoured table, on which she put both her arms suddenly, and her head on them, and cried and cried.

I wonder if anything of a remotely suggested consciousness came to Rael Heybrook, with those words and tears, of an unlived possibility of this girl's nature, in which had rooted itself this devotion to his home and him? If there did, he felt it with a reverence. "We shall prize you all our lives for this, you good, dear friend," he said, his voice strong with gentleness. "But don't take on, you 're all tired out." He ended as commonplacely as she had done. The speech that comes up on the instant from the deepest heart does but catch to itself its oldest, most familiar garment by the way. Israel laid the hand she had dropped from hers upon her shoulder, brotherly.

"She 's ben up all night," said Hollis, coming in. "An' she won't let any o' them folks out here to do an individgiwil thing; an' ther 'll be dinners all day long, like 's not. There 's Flynton Steele drivin' in this minute."

"You see to him and his horse, and keep them all off," said Israel. "I 'll go back and fetch my mother."

So they took care of Sarell now, and it was time. Mrs. Heybrook came, loved her and kissed her, told her she could n't have done more if she had been their own girl, and they never could make it up to her, but the Lord would, and her husband, and, — "There! there! she *must* go now and get rested." And she went with her up stairs, and made her lie down; and while she spread some wrap round her shoulders and feet, she leaned over her and said, "I *used* t' think — but there, his looks must 'ev misreppersented him. He used t' be so kind o' fine, you know; but he 's stiddy an' good, an' ef a woman *sets* her mark, a man doos somehow grow up to it, when she sets it lovin'."

Sarell clung an instant to the motherly shoulders. "Ef I 've *got* any mark, f 'r myself or f 'r Hollis either, t' help him grow up to, I 've got it livin' with your folks, Mis' Heybrook, an' I 'm thankful!"

Perhaps there is many a woman who goes through life with "her mark set," — where she has had some vision out of reach, at the height where she could love with all there is of her, — trying to love somebody up to it all the way; and perhaps

in the kingdom of heaven she finds that she has got him there.

It was still and peaceful in Sarell's attic-room, wide and sunshiny though low, extending over both kitchen and outroom, with its little windows to the south and west. From her bed, as she lay, she could look across the hollow to the foot-bridge under the buttonwood trees over the brook, — the way that led by hill and field to the West Side and the Heybrook farm.

It was all theirs back again now, and more too. There they were downstairs with the papers. They knew all now, and they would be so glad; and it was her doing.

She forgot all about Mother Pemble and the sealed locks. She remembered only the right, peaceful, thankful things, — how Rael had said they would prize her all their lives, how she had earned a place in their lives with them now, how everything was safe in their hands; and while she thought she was only resting, she fell softly, deeply asleep, and slept the long forenoon through.

Did Mother Pemble sleep? After she had done one thing.

There was that low stir in the house that covered all low stirring, — voices, subdued but incessant, and feet passing and repassing in the parlor, through the parlor-bedroom, keeping-room, and where the dead man lay. Doors were opened and shut; there was sweeping and moving of things about; then there was a luncheon-table and the clatter of dishes in the keeping-room. The surge of bustle that a country household keeps up when the neighbors all turn in and are to be politely entreated, and the preparations for a funeral go forward.

There was time enough, and cover enough, for all Mother Pemble need do to-day.

She had let it be too late for any other doing. Now she must go on, and she had not waited seven years to wish to do otherwise.

Seven years for at best, perhaps, but a difference of three thousand dollars.

But that was a vast difference to Mother Pemble. That, added to what was sure, meant opulence and consequence for all their days for herself and for Care'line. It meant a house

and pretty front yard in town or village, the height of a retiring rural ambition; a hired girl to do their work; things as they wanted them, and nobody to tyrannize or dictate; dreams fulfilled that she had lain here and dreamed, and carefully nursed and kept herself to enjoy. Not here, where people would notice and talk over and wonder how. There were other places, places where they would rather live. Anywhere, at any time, those papers were money, good for cash or for investments, as Deacon Amb had said.

It might not have turned out so; half a dozen things might have prevented; if those had been registered bonds even. But they were the last shape he had put his funds into that he might want again any day. Flynton Steele had said they were just as well, temporarily. Mother Pemble knew something about business or she would not have dared to meddle. She had been a widow herself, and had had money in bonds.

"Care'line?" — all these considerations went through Mother Pemble's mind, as they had done many times before, — "Care'line? Pshaw! When did she ever trouble her head where money came from? What they had might grow. Flynton Steele was a good manager. They might 'be prospered' as the deacon had been, an' Care'line never'd inquire how. Nor Flynton would n't go into particklers, for that matter. Flynton would n't have listened to any open word of settlin' for herself in this way, before nor after; but he knew Aunt Harriet was n't a fool an' never had been, an' that Care'line could be turned over anybody's finger an' not know it. Likely it was his doing, partly, that things was got back ev'ry little while into handy shape like that.

"She had taken her chance, perhaps other folks had; it might stand Flynton Steele in hand as much as anybody if things worked well for them, and he knew it. She had taken her chance and things *had* worked well; ther' was nothing got that *was n't* tried for. Now she had risked the last stroke, and ther' was n't, ther' *mus' n't* be, anything that anybody could *prewve*."

"After all, it was only their own back again, with what it ought to bring." That was the little soothing breeze she kept up with the fluttering rag that was all she had left of her conscience. She was looking out for her own and Care'line's.

If it had not been for this sharp Sarell and this watch and ward of hers that had gone on now, with a narrowing and concentrating scrutiny and stringency, for months, and had culminated in the bold, prompt action of the last twenty-four hours, there would have been no trouble at all with her own final procedures; everything would have been in her own hands. But she had not been idle as to provisional thinking all the while that she had felt Sarell's clever parallels investing her closer and closer; and since the stroke of the sealed locks she had rapidly taken her mental measures, which needed only certain calculable opportunities for carrying out.

Mother Heybrook had just looked in, and in her innocent, kindly fashion told her that she would see to anything that was wanted, for Sarell was beat out and had gone to bed; whereupon Mother Pemble had said that she had n't had any rest herself all night, and if Mrs. Heybrook would have the goodness to fasten that door into the parlor, she guessed she 'd put her latch down and get a good sleep now, if she could; after which Mother Heybrook herself did her best in warning off disturbance, and the coast was clear.

She had made up her mind to one safe thing to do; safe either way, for nothing could be "prewved" even if the nearly certain circumstances should not play in for her as she desired. It was her best move, and it could but fail. It was her very strongest chance, and it hardly could fail.

She had thought over all that would be doing, all that would be wanting, all that she could count upon from others of unconscious co-operation, and there was one way of getting her spoil out of her own territories and yet under such concealment as would keep it in her own knowledge and power for future access. Mother Pemble was a very quick-witted and "all-round" woman.

She crept up into that attic again. She did something there with a little use of scissors and some cautious stitches, — scrupulously few and half drawn, — with a very strong, *soiled* thread, by which she was enabled to slide away and to secure, at the same time leaving a most unguarded appearance of things, such as had been obvious for years, two thin, flat parcels pinned in soft old flannel wraps.

It was down in a dusty, cobwebbed corner, just inside that eave-closet door; nothing was moved more than could possibly be helped; in the careful replacing she even managed dexterously to catch the overhanging edge of a web that floated in dim palpableness and with tenacious grasp from a rough crossing beam.

Some grim grotesqueness seemed to strike her as she turned to creep away. "It 'll *foller after*," she said in a half-breathed whisper, with sinister-smiling lips and eyes, "an' it 'll come back, like the rest, as cherfle 's ever! Then let 'em look; let 'em find it ef they can, an' let 'em *prewve* it!"

She slipped along down into her room again, holding with fingers as well as with her woollen-stockinged feet from edge to edge of the stairs. She took off and put back into the walnut chest the short wrapper she had had on over her bed-dress, and left the lid resting on its hasp as it had been in the morning. She was almost ready for her nap.

There was one thing more she meant to do, but that must wait the next safely coming opportunity. They would n't open anything till after the funeral.

When they did, she would have Flynton Steele called in on their part. He was like a good partner at whist: he might not know what was in her hand, he would n't want to know, but if there was a card that needed to be played and it lay in his, he would play it for her good and for Care'line's.

Meanwhile, thinking this over after she had once more got back into bed, she unwound the large ball of gray yarn from which she was knitting and wound it up again, tucking some small, hard object away in the middle of it as she did so. And then she laid ball and work back beside her on the counterpane, turned her face inward from the windows, and went to sleep like a Napoleon.

This was on Thursday.

On Friday Flynton Steele drove over again. Care'line was in her mother's room; the parlor was appropriated; the deacon lay there handsomely disposed of; long rows of empty chairs stood waiting around the walls.

Mother Pemble kept somebody with her, now, all the time.

It was lonesome there, with only that door between, and there were other reasons.

Flynton Steele came in; he was careful, in these intermediate days, not to closet himself with Mrs. Pemble, but with the rest all in and out, he sat there talking with the restrained politeness people show to Death as they step slightly aside for him to pass who has no errand for themselves.

So it happened that he and Mrs. Heybrook and Farmer Welcome himself, who was just come to take his wife home to rest before the funeral, were all there when Hollis Bassett looked in at the door with a question for the widow. They were brushing up, outside, with vehicles and harness, for to-morrow's procession.

"D' y' know, Missis Newell, where the deacon kep' the cushins of the new chaise?"

Now the new chaise was new in the sense that the last horse raised upon the farm is always the colt; it had been bought more than a dozen years ago, — a wide, comfortable thing in which the deacon in the elder time had driven his two womenfolks, country-bodkinwise, in and out of Reade and Hawksbury. For many years of late it had been rarely taken out; the deacon preferred either the open, one-seat wagon or the ancient gig for his own use, according to his errands.

"Why, yes, Hollis, t' be sure," answered the widow serenely. "In the keepin' room attic; I guess likely in the eave-cluzzit. You c'n go right up."

Which Hollis did, returning with the two solid, square cushions,— the leather bottoms stiff with old damps and dust, and places in each where the seams had started slightly along the edges. But they were the "new" cushions, kept sacredly away from the common stowage of the barn, where the chaise stood in a shroud of old quilts.

"How long it is sence that 's ben out before!" said Care'line, with her bereaved sigh.

Mother Pemble had securely counted on some such auxiliary sentiment as this. Things happened very well.

"I hope you won't let that shay be sold off, Care'line,— ef things air sold," she said, as Hollis, followed by Farmer and

Mrs. Heybrook, went out of the room, and Flynton Steele also rose to go. "You ain't rid much lately, but you want something you *could* ride in; an' that 's low and big an' easy. Flynton 'll see to it — an' anything else you like — when the time comes." And Mother Pemble left it there, in deference to the silent halt, close to them, of that Passer-by.

There had been just enough of careful emphasis on the words that referred to Flynton.

"My cousin may call on me for any service I can be to her," said Mr. Steele, with a not absolutely accurate elegance, and recognizing some lead which, without wholly understanding, he was to follow. He made a note in his mind of the old chaise, — I beg pardon, the new one. Mother Pemble never troubled her mind very much with anything unless it "signified."

The funeral took place on Saturday. We will dwell on nothing that we need not; there is little room — and can be little relish — for a lingering over the closing particulars of this portion of our story. The hankering after such, in the circumstance of any death, — of body or of soul, — is morbid.

Sarell had sat, with bonnet on, in the small household group, during the funeral prayers. Then, when the widow and Flynton Steele, Farmer Heybrook and his wife, his two boys, and the minister had gone forth, and Hollis, fully expecting to take his wife beside him in the neat light wagon he had provided, and that was standing in its turn before the door, came in for her, she quietly whispered, "I 'm pretty tired, Hollis, an' I 'd full as soon be th' one t' see t' the house. You take Mis' Streakham, — yes, do, that 's a good fellow, — she wants t' go." And Hollis, much amazed, and also greatly disgusted, considering his best clothes and the tidy team he had hired with his old love of driving off in style, had to turn round and give his arm to the lady in the rusty black bonnet and thin "cyprus" veil that were associated with all occasions like the present in Fellaiden as regularly as the black-draperied "narrow carriage," and who, on her part, with concurrent arrangement, already stood up, waiting.

And so, at last, in the stillness and balminess of one of the exceptional spring days, the long train of various vehicles filed

away around the hill; and the house in the Hollow was left open, hushed, empty,— as a house only is when there has just been such a departure from it.

Sarell had had a seat within the parlor bedroom, near the closet-passage, open also now, into Mother Pemble's room. When the services were over, and a few women who had been in the "east room" had come forth, she had slipped behind them and stood quietly in the inner doorway.

"'S that you, Sarell?" asked Mother Pemble, from the bed. "I wish t' mercy you 'd shet me up 'fore y' go. I can't hev Goody Streakham comin' in. I 'm clear wore out."

Sarell came in, closing and fastening the door behind her; then, without further word, passed through into the keeping-room passage, closing that door also, and slipping the loop of cord that still hung from the press-room knob over its handle, as she went; and regaining her place in the parlor, she gently pushed the door of the closet entrance to and turned the key. Then, her mind quite made up to what she had already been considering, she had spoken to Mrs. Streakham, and confounded Hollis, as we have seen.

Sarell stood at the porch door a few minutes, looking forth upon the sweet quiet of blue air and flecking clouds and pale-gray hills,— of the springing green of the earth, and fretwork of budding branches against the sky. She took off her bonnet and dropped it upon a chair; then she walked out and around to the open shed-way, and so through to the keeping-room. There she paused again for a little, thinking how strange it all was, and how long ago it seemed that she had passed the day and night there that had been the old man's last chance of "clear freewill."

She had no distinct intention of watching for anything now. She only felt it right she should be there, about the place. She had supposed that all effective watching was over, save that of maintaining the certainty that there could be no outside freedom from those two rooms, where whatever was to be cared for must still be. Presently, she went slowly up the stairs to her own end of the house. These were solid old oaken stairs, built in with the chimney; there was no creaking with these, and

Sarell's shoes were silent. But as she passed upward, she distinctly heard that slow creak again,— quite near overhead. She went on, quickly and softly, into her own room; the eave-closet door was ajar.

The stairway, the chimney, and a closet over the stairs were between her and the little attic. She could hear no sound now, and she was secure that no slight sound of hers could be perceived. She slipped off her dress and put on a flannel sacque. All her other clothing was soft and noiseless.

Behind the chimney, against the slope of it, was the partition of the closets in the eave. The two boards removed had been the last, short ones in the low space. Beyond the opening there lay a feather-bed, bundled up in an old "patch." This she had just squeezed aside, so as to leave a creeping-path behind it toward the other end. On her own side she had kept some little pile of clothing that had covered and darkened the access.

After all, her time had come to use this way that she had made.

She had necessarily occupied some minutes; it was so still that she dared not go forward, and it seemed as if the place must be again vacant.

But presently she heard a sliding sound. "Can that be *possible?*" she thought; and immediately withdrew into her room again, where she went and sat down upon the floor behind some screening pots of little plants in one of the low, oblong south windows.

There were two of these in this room, and one in the small attic. They were, perhaps, two and a half feet high. The one from the attic was scarcely three feet above the slightly sloping roof that ran down from a little above the second floor of the main house, over the built-on parlor-bedroom and a stoop beyond, at whose edge it came nearly to the level of the top of the well-curb that stood a little way from its outer corner, just within the line of a quadrangle enclosed on three sides by the stoop, the house extension, and the open shed facing the well.

An agile person might, perhaps, get down and up again by the planking of the curb, which was within a long step and grasp of the simple double and crosspieced support of the stoop.

Was that possible for Mother Pemble?

At any rate, there was Mother Pemble now, out upon the roof. The low window-ledge, almost level with the floor, and the slight drop outside, gave her all this scope and chance of freedom,— freedom, even, over the whole farm. Sarell wondered she had never thought of that before.

But now she was exaggerating the possibilities. Mother Pemble could not go all over the farm, though within a certain none the less surprising limit she had undoubtedly ranged. In her square chest and up here in her packed-away trunks, she had access to her clothing, of whatever sort; and in her own room she had convenience for restoring to order whatever traces might have been otherwise left of soil or use. Mother Pemble had taken energetic care not to get bedridden in earnest.

As she sat there now, evidently enjoying the sweet, soft, open air, she was a curious figure to Sarell's sight, observing her from between the screening stems of her geraniums and heliotropes.

She was in a rambling — or scrambling — costume, exactly adapted to her purposes; and in it she presented, as she sat there upon the roof, — her knees raised by her feet drawn under her, and her arms clasped round them, — in a short, rough jacket of some common fur that had probably been a man's overcoat, such as the farmers here drove about in in the winter time, loose, dark woollen trousers, no impeding skirt, and a close-fitting, horizontally projecting quilted black silk hood, — an aspect that instantly accounted to Mrs. Bassett's mind for Dr. Fargood's apparition of the dog.

"She 's worked hard!" Sarell ejaculated with scornful breath. "She 's worked *hard*. An' I wonder what sort 'v 'n opinion she 's ben able t' keep up 'v herself thriew it all? She 's a kind 'v a reddle, an' a awfle crooked one, — that woman; but I persume the ol' Father o' lies keeps track o' th' spellin' ov it, an' deac'ns it out to her 's she goes along. — *Now* what 's she up to?"

Mother Pemble crept down the slope, and along the stoop-roof, to the point opposite the well. There she sat down, upon

the very edge, with one hand, that seemed to hold some small thing, raised; she leaned forward carefully, holding on with the other hand down beside her, clutching the shingles; she stretched her right hand over, the object in it lightly grasped between the extremes of thumb and fingers; she made one or two little swinging motions with it, as measuring accurately aim and distance; then she gave a toss, — they say a woman never throws, — and something described a slight parabola over the framing curb, and dropped plumb into the very centre of the well.

"*That* don't need tellin'," said Sarell. "She 's took care 'v the *key*." And as Mother Pemble turned to creep up the roof again, Sarell vanished from her post and sped round, through the partition passage, to the eave-closet, taking with her, as she passed through her own division of it, a stout knitting-needle that was thrust there in readiness in a crevice behind a beam. This she slipped through the wide crack of the time-shrunken door, pushed upward a loose old wooden button, and let herself softly into the south attic.

"I *could* keep her out there t'll the kerridges all come home," considered Mrs. Bassett with herself, as she stooped low to approach the sliding window, and reaching it, knelt down and laid her hand upon its frame. "But — come to — I guess I c'n give her that odds, 'n be even with her, yit. An' I 'd *dispise*, now, t' scare her int' *tellin'* me anything. — Too," she interrupted herself with a briskly worded thought, "'f I hev t' ask anybody, 't might be some body more rispect'ble! Ef Rael Heybrook's dog hed one sniff 'v that wallet, he 'd nose out anything th't hed been in it, all over the farm."

So Sarell calmly removed her hand, drew herself back to where she could stand, and listened an instant; heard Mother Pemble's steps approaching over the shingles, and flitted into the closet shelter, with the door not quite shut to.

Mother Pemble knelt up, and writhed in, head foremost, at the window, then sat down on the floor inside. She was close to her own stairway, now, and she could afford to linger. The sweet southwest wind blew round her, and stirred all through the close, little, shingly-smelling chamber.

"It 's a proper pleasant day," the old woman said softly, just as if she had the most innocent right to enjoy it; and she unfastened the horizontal hood, and unbuttoned the thick fur jacket, and let both slip back upon her shoulders.

"'An to-morrer 's Sunday; an' Monday — well, let 'em hunt! Let 'em prewve something, now! The's no key but the blessed deac'n's; 'n wherever things is *he must a put 'em.* They 'll be smart, though, ef they think of lookin' in a ol' — "

Sarell was close by; but the half-murmured words failed to distinguish themselves to her, thus far; only at this point, the old woman, sitting in the fresh air, *sneezed* —

"SHAY-CUSHIN!"

The word had been formed upon her lip; the sudden convulsion drove it forth in forced articulation and spasmodic violence.

That which had been done secretly in the closet was proclaimed literally, and by the very doer, upon the house-top.

Sarell went out to her husband in the dooryard when the carriages had come home.

A boy from the Centre was to drive back the hired team. Hollis was unhitching the gray horse from the new chaise.

"S'pose I might 's well leave this jest as 't is now," he said, as she stood by till he wheeled the vehicle back into its recess in the old barn.

"I 'd kevver it up," said Sarell.

"I mean the cushins. They 'll do well enough; I c'n turn the luther sides up."

"Where did y' fetch them cushins from?" inquired his wife.

"Why, the south attic, where the deac'n kep' 'em; but they 're better off here, where they 'll be 'tended to. They was all dust 'n cobwebs."

"Hollis, when the folks is all gone to-night, you fetch them cushins in to me."

"What fur?"

"So 's 't I c'n 'tend to 'em properly. — The' might be a rat's nest inside."

On Monday they opened the old secretary.

Papers were found in abundance, but all carefully docketed and filed; it did not take three men long to run them over.

Mother Pemble lay against her pillows, knitting.

The leather wallet was there, under the sliding lid; there were papers in that also, worn and creased with long lying; but no fresh ones, nothing that represented money.

"That 's surprisin'," said Farmer Heybrook, holding the memorandum in his hand. But he said it much as if his capacity for being surprised were exhausted.

"Better look thurrer, while ye 've got it in hand," trebled Mother Pemble from the bed. "I 'd ruther — Care'line 'n I would — y' should n't leave the house 'thout findin' out what *is* in it, 'n where 'bouts."

"What other places is the' — locked? Ambrose was a kerfle man," said Welcome.

"Care'line c'n tell ye, — y' c'n try all the keys; but I guess they 're mos'ly old ones th't don't b'long t' nothin'. Th' deac'n, he was fond o' keys; alwers kerried a whole bunch. Git 'em all th' keys 'n th' house, Care'line, — an' show 'em all the locks."

"La, ma!" said Care'line, and then stopped to sigh her bereaved sigh again, as if the levity of the "La!" had been hardly lawful. "The' never was nothin' locked up 'n th' whole place, — but your things an' the deac'n's seckerterry."

"Well, — they c'n look 'n *my* things, then," said the old woman. "They 'd best do th' whole job up, so' s 't the' can't ever be nothin' said."

"I think everything ought to be here. I think he said so to Sarell," said Israel Heybrook, disregarding the little interlude. "He came here to look over his papers, she told me, the day before he died."

"Ask Mrs. Bassett to come in," said Flynton Steele.

Sarell came in. "Where did you understand Deacon Newell that these papers were?" he asked her, taking the memorandum from Farmer Heywood's hand, and signifying with it.

"In a luther wallet, in that seckerterry; in a right-hand pigeon-hole, under a led. That 's what I understood the day 'fore he died, when he wanted 'em t' look over."

"There is nothing there of any importance to look over. Has the secretary been opened since?"

"I sh'd persume not. But I can't say."

Mother Pemble was knitting on industriously; but she changed her needle at this moment, and sent a sharp glance over her glasses at Sarell. Mrs. Bassett never looked her way at all.

"Who put the seals on?"

"I did; fust chance I got after I knew Deac'n Amb never 'd git here agin nex' day, 's he meant to, t' see t' things himself."

"Curious, was n't it, you should happen to think of such a thing? You 're quite a woman of business, Mrs. Bassett."

"The's a good many things in the world th't 's cur'ous, Mr. Steele," returned Sarell coolly. "But *I* ain't, nor yet a business woman, nerry one. I 'm just straightforrud, 'n 'v got common sense; that 's all."

Something in Sarell's eyes seemed as if the trick were not to be taken that way; she looked as if she might play a trump. Mr. Flynton Steele changed his fingering of the cards.

"Did Deacon Newell *tell* you, when you made this memorandum, that the papers mentioned were in this secretary?"

Sarell was silent, recollecting. She called back to her mind the exact words that had passed between her and the old man.

"No, sir," she replied. "He said the' was *more;* an' I asked him ef he hed n't better le' me make a memmirander 'v whatever the' was. That 's percisely what I asked him, an' all he said. 'N then he d'rected it off t' me, an' I made it."

Mr. Steele turned to the secretary.

"Did y' want to ask me any more questions?" said Sarell.

"Not at present, Mrs. Bassett."

"When y' do, I 'll answer 'em t' the best o' my knowledge an' ability." And Sarell departed.

They went through all the papers again; opened every drawer, examined every pigeon-hole and compartment.

"They certainly are not here," said Flynton Steele. "They may be anywhere, or nowhere. The old man may have tucked them away, or he may have disposed of them; or his mind may have been a little wandering among old things; there was nobody with him but that young woman, and she could hardly judge."

"Sarell has a *great deal* of common sense and faithfulness," said Israel Heybrook, reverting to her own simple claim for herself, and emphasizing it. "If anybody can suggest anything, — unless you, Mr. Steele, have some clew to his management of things lately, — perhaps she can; but it will be of her honest judgment and observation, if she does;" he purposely used the word assertive of the quality Mr. Flynton Steele had denied her, — "she won't be in a hurry to intrude."

"We can call her back, then," said the double cousin. "No, Mr. Israel, I do not know the recent disposition of Mr. Newell's affairs. I have, from time to time, within the last few months, made sales for him, and paid him money, for which I have his receipts; and I remember once his asking me about registered and not registered bonds. If these were registered, we can find out about them easily enough; but if not, — well, he could n't have disposed of so much money, I should say, without its being traceable; but he may never have had it all at once in his possession; or he may, as I said, have stowed it away queerly. People do such things, sometimes. Mrs. Bassett seems to have had a good deal of the care of matters here. Suppose you do see if anything will occur to her?"

Sarell was called back.

"We do not find all the papers, Mrs. Bassett," said Flynton Steele to her. "We cannot verify your memorandum. Do you know of — can you suggest — any place where we had better look for them?"

There was just a shade again of that tentative browbeating, which might be followed up, or backed down from, as circumstances should develop.

Sarell answered not a word, but turned and walked out of the room.

"She 's affronted," said Care'line.

"Sarell does n't know anything she ought not to," spoke up Rael Heybrook; and Flynton Steele recognized through the quiet tone something that it would not do to affront in him.

"Oh no, I imagine not," he said carelessly.

And with that, Sarell was back again.

She held forth two flat parcels, pinned smoothly in thin flan-

nel cloths. They were between the tips of her two thumbs and fingers.

"I sidgest these," she said. "Is these anything like 'em?"

Rael came across the room to her. Some curious association with her words, in the keen humor under their quaint dignity, flashed a gleam of amusement over his gravely bright face. "Have you caught the rooster *again*, Sarell?" he asked her, in low, pleasant italics that nobody quite apprehended but herself.

Sarell's face shone all over, and her eyes met his all alight. She felt suddenly gay and dancing in her very heart.

Rael Heybrook understood her. A perception, deep enough for surface play and sparkle, was between them. In that little allusion there was implied and conceded her old and continued household oneness with them. Rael was her thorough, trustful, thankful friend; the word of quick recognition in a slight thing came easily. That proud, sober Israel! There are friendships and friendships, thank the Lord of all our human hosts. Sarell was satisfied.

Mr. Flynton Steele took the parcels from Rael, who offered them.

"Where did you find these, Mrs. Bassett?" he demanded, in a certain judicial way.

Sarell answered like a shrewd witness, who has had her hand on the Book, but who, perhaps, from something inside the Book, is held to a discretion.

"I looked into things — last night — a little, — an' straightened 'em — in the deac'n's room," she said measuredly. "An' I found *them* — under a cushin-kevver. That 's p'utty much all I care 'bout sayin'; but you c'n ask me more queschins, 'f y' want to; an' *I 'll answer 'em.*"

She never once looked toward the bed. Mother Pemble sat there, with a face that was neither pale nor red nor livid nor contorted, — that was simply *struck so*, as one might say; as common people do say it, with the adverbial addition of "all in a heap."

"Do you know what is in them?"

"I ain't looked. They 're pinned thriew, an' you won't find but one set o' pin-holes. They 're percisely as I found 'em."

Flynton Steele turned back to the secretary. Israel's face had the look of absolute faith in her, and in whatever unknown discretion of her reticence, that was full and generous reward. Farmer Heybrook simply waited, mystified alike by good fortune and the obliquities of its approach. Care'line never asked questions.

"I c'n go?" inquired Sarell, still never looking at the bed.

But Mother Pemble revived with a sting of intense, irrepressible spite.

"Them that hides, c'n find," she half hissed, half muttered.

"Sh — h!" articulated Flynton Steele, reproachfully or warningly, as it might be, from over the footboard; emphatically, at any rate.

Then Sarell turned round and looked straight at Mother Pemble.

The weather had changed. The day was raw and gusty. Sarell had left the doors open behind her.

Mother Pemble, as she looked at her, sneezed. One does that, perhaps, even in a fright or a grief.

"I wish you 'd go out, or shet the doors," said the old woman vindictively. "You 've set 'em wide open all thriew th' house. I 'm gitt'n my death-a-cold."

Sarell came up to the bedstead. She took a shawl and drew it up round the miserable old shoulders without touching them. She spoke low, but clearly, bending over Mother Pemble's head.

"The doors — an winders — *hez* been open a good deal lately," she said. "I don't doubt a mite you *hev* got cold. I should n't wonder 'f you begun it Sat'day. Folks must be ketchin' awfle colds, when they 're took a-sneezin' — *shay-cushins.*" The last sentence dropped to something very softly illustrative in a whisper; besides which, Flynton Steele covered the speech, as it progressed, with the wheeling round of the deacon's great desk-chair to seat himself in it, and then wheeling it back again when he had done so, to face the secretary.

Sarell went out, and shut all the doors. They might be shut now; she had no need, no wish, to open them any more.

"You 'd better let that young woman alone, Aunt Harriet,"

Flynton Steele found opportunity to say to Mrs. Pemble just before he left, himself, to go back to Hawksbury.

We may go, too; we shall have no need to come back to the east room or to its inmate.

And I hope you are as glad to be done with Mother Pemble as I am.

CHAPTER XLV.

NINE FROM NOUGHT, AND FELLAIDEN NEWS.

It is no use to talk about "the world." There are as many worlds as there are things to do in it and motives to do from. There are whole spheres of people,— they talk about spheres, but they never mean it literally, as it is,— circulating and circulating, all to themselves, in their real life and centres, as much as if they were set off in space in a system. Only these spheres, like all the realities, interpenetrate each other; and we cross each other's tracks, and think we are on the same because while we are near the angle we are near each other, but presently shall find ourselves whole infinitudes apart.

Set out on any idea you will: if it lead you, you drift surely into its connection and conformity, and no other. Everything else is collateral to its forces. And it is only when you get into a particular drift that you find out the fellowship of it. From positive philosophy to postage stamps,— from political economy to the fashion of trailed gowns,— from church to charity fairs, — engaging yourself with whatever, you find yourself taking to people, and people taking to you, whom, and in a way that, you would otherwise have had no recognition or experience of. "Set,"—"sort,"— neither expresses it. It is organism.

There were people in Boston — a whole related order of people — whom France did not know, except as persons of a certain social level know that each other are, and salute when they meet at the grade crossings of their paths. Until, all at once, this need of doing something — this pressing home of the perception that there must be one help more somewhere in the world for her being in it, or there would be no help to that very being of her own — came full upon her.

She went to Devereux Hartie, the Professor of Moral Mathe-

matics. She knew him as a gentleman; so she could speak to him. She thought he belonged, in a measure certainly, to her own circle: she was to find out what a different thing it would be to belong to his. (I would mention that Devereux Hartie was a Reverend; but they tell me I can't get along at all without a minister, and it rather hampers me; yet as to that, all I have to say is, Who can?)

"I want to come into your class in arithmetic," she said playfully.

"O,—multiplication table?" he queried in reply. "Ten times—"

"I 'm not so far on as multiplication," returned France. "I 'm in subtraction. Nine from nought you can't, you know; so borrow ten and carry one. I come across a nought now and then." Still with that cover of sport, and still with the earnestness underneath.

The Professor of Mathematics laughed gently; the response to the earnestness was in his look.

"There is nothing else for it — in the whole science," he said. "Borrow your ten,— to *carry*. You must come into our Cheerful Club, Miss France."

"I would if I knew how."

"We don't do anything *but* borrow," he said,—"and lend. We shine round, in a small, moonlighty way, into dull places. We borrow books, and lend them; we borrow pictures, and have a circulating simulacracy; we borrow things to work with,— patterns, materials,— and we work them up. This year we have a little Winter Flower Mission; the flowers that have done duty for an evening, at a dinner table or in the girls' bouquets, — they handle and freshen them tenderly, thinking of this,— or borrowed from their conservatories and flower-stands; we borrow everything; money, when we must,—never pay, that's not included,— and lend that out, carefully. Borrow all along the line, and let it come out of the big last figure; the subtrahend always looks the largest till you come to that; and then — you see."

"I see; it has to leave the noughts all there, after all."

"The more little figures and noughts to take from, the bigger

the leading numeral turns out to be. Has to. That's never a nought. Here endeth the first lesson. Go and talk to Mrs. Kellis Waite, and tell her to bring you the next Club night."

So she went to Mrs. Kellis Waite, feeling like Mousie in the story, running round and round to earn back her own "long tail again."

Mrs. Kellis Waite set her to work on half a dozen things,— borrowing, enlisting gay girls in the bouquet mission, writing letters to postmasters and pastors all over the country map, inquiring out people and places to send little holiday-seekers to next summer, from the "poor streets" of the hot city. And she took her to Mr. Devereux Hartie's on the Cheerful Club night.

France found people in it whom she had seen only in occasional surface ways before, people who she had no idea had this world behind the other; she felt as if they had stolen a march upon her, and very nearly left her out. So surprised are we when we discover that the same sort of napkin with which we have hidden our talent has been with our neighbor but decently folded *as* a napkin, while the money has gone and been multiplied over and over again among the exchangers.

She found also new people, a whole clan and kindred of them, who wore hats and coats and gowns that covered up their angelhood, and walked among the crowd as if no different from it, but rather liker and humaner to each particle of it. It made her feel behindhand,— as if she must make haste, as if she must begin and grow up all over again. If she had counted up her life in this wise, and set her sum of it, perhaps she would not — so soon — have come to that nought in her arithmetic.

There was some danger in her hurry; there is danger in all hurry, and in too much of the tangential, even among the heavenly forces. The heavenly bodies must not rush nor spurt; the entirest motion is that which seems not to be a motion, or a change of place at all.

"Don't take up everything," Miss Ammah told her. "The Lord seldom gives *one* great, outside mission; He never gives half a dozen at a time."

Miss Ammah watched her. She knew she had been trying to take nine from nothing, somewhere.

One and another drew her into this and that; that is the way in the City of Good Works.

Each good work was good, was needful; was admirable, often, in its execution as in its inception; but the aggregate of them, and that which the aggregate revealed — namely, the terrible mass and complication of the needs, the frightful multiplying and differencing of that mysterious element of Wrong in the world, that these outside remedies, working at the surface and unable to get at the heart, were trying to right — dismayed her. It was such a big world, so irretrievably snarled up before she belonged to it; she almost wondered what she was put here to be discouraged for.

A good deal of this was subjective, no doubt; there had been a hitch in the running of her own young life, and it made her feel all the retarding, contrary action,— all the "keeping on without ever coming to it," as she expressed it to Miss Ammah, — that was set in the very laws of things, and the shape the world had taken.

"It *is* a 'round and round,' Miss Ammah," she said one day, coming in at the Berkeley, after a hospital visit with Mrs. Waite,— where she had heard of five cases that there were no beds for,— and an hour at a mission class,— where one bright, wicked little girl had gleefully told her that "Nancy was n't coming any more, and she guessed she 'd leave off too after to-day, now she 'd got her apurns done." "It 's just over and over, and finding yourself back at the beginning all the time. And you can't more than *touch* it, after all."

"Well, that's the way of the sun, too," replied the good lady; "and the mornings and evenings will have to keep being the days, as long as the earth stands, I suppose. But I 'll *tell* you. There 's a mistake in it, too. And with a good many of you it is n't so much like the evenings and mornings as it is like something I saw and laughed at one day, and laid up for a moral, in Fellaiden, last summer."

"Oh, do give me a breath from Fellaiden!" France responded, parting her lips as if to draw in a great gasp of mountain freshness after the choke and flurry and sickening miasm.

"It was a sudden, pelting shower," said Miss Ammah, "and

three half-grown turkeys were running round and round a gooseberry bush, looking for a shelter. They kept on, heads to tails, just following each other, out in the rain all the time, and never knowing that they were running in a circle. They were worse off than if there had n't been any gooseberry bush. If they had only dived *in* somewhere, to some one little corner!"

"But I suppose they were n't near any, and there was nothing but the bush to beat about," said France, forgetting after all to take her long breath, or finding something in the way of it. "I think people who have a corner are a great deal the best off. The big round outside is too much for anybody!"

"And it always will be," said radical Miss Ammah, "so long as it 's taken at the outside. Besides which it grows huger and huger, and they have the farther and the faster to run. If everything was *right*, — mind I don't say you should do nothing at all outside until it is, — but if everything was right in the midst of things, there would n't be the lots of frameworks round things that take up the strength and material now. No politics, but only honest working at public work; no police of charities, but just everybody loving his neighbor as himself, and so ready with his right hand that the need would never get round so far as to let the left hand know. The *ought* of everything would be the 'owing,' — look in your Webster for that, — and we should all be paying our small debts, and the public debt would be getting paid with it, as we went along."

"They have to begin with that in the small places," said France, and her Fellaiden breath exhaled in a sigh of recollection. The things that Israel Heybrook had said to her that afternoon up on Crowned Head came back to her, and she went off thinking about them, not much freshened, truly, by the Fellaiden air Miss Ammah had uncorked from a bottle.

Rael and Mr. Kingsworth and that Miss Leonora were living this life up there. "How green and sweet the earth might be," she thought as she trod the wide brick-walks between the stately buildings, "if there *need n't* be these conglomerated cities and all this storing of things to make trade out of! When the circulation congests anywhere in the human body it makes a wen or a tumor, I suppose. O dear! we are so proud of our congestions on this bewildered little planet!"

"I wonder if there are n't a good many things we don't 'owe' to do that we undertake to do, and if so the things we do owe to do don't get left undone?" she resumed with herself, with certainly a very nimble play upon the verb "to do." And she came to the partial conclusion that "dictionary-Bible" did really throw a wonderful deal of light.

Only, after all, she could n't see which way to go. Taking the whole city of Boston on her hands was n't going to settle any single little own "ought" of hers.

There was still her individual, restless life — Frances Everidge's — behind it all. Something in which, could she hear it rightly, there must be the individual summons and placing, "Come *hither*, my child! Sit *here* — stand *here* — and do this little work — all thine — for Me!" She did so long for a "corner." She thought she might be made for some small place, but not for these manifold great things. She knew the trouble was that she had attacked them in bulk; she had not come to them in the gradual order of her living, by the leading from inch to inch. She was trying, because one fair stone she might have laid in the Building had dropped from her grasp, to lift up the whole side of the Pyramid.

The call came to her for just a present time, as it does come often through the very working of our laborious self-perplexities to cut the knot of them, to lie down and to endure. France was taken ill.

It was a nervous feverishness settling itself upon a cold, and threatening to drop those modifying syllables and take the form of asserted malady. She was good for nothing, she said at first; then prohibitions were laid upon her; then there was nothing to do but to be good for nothing, and it was the hardest thing she had tried yet.

It came about, though, that it made things possible for saying and doing, without which — yet who shall say without what anything might not have happened?

For one thing, and the chief thing, France had plenty of time to think. There was no use in being in a hurry to do. She settled a good deal with herself carefully, and in no hurry, in these days. And presently she found something

very distinct to do in regard to these things that she was settling.

Also, she seemed to get Miss Ammah back again out of that restraint and aloofness. The good woman came often to her, and came close. The young girl was grown very dear to her heart and to her oldening life.

France found out, too, that her mother was getting worn. The long-continued youthfulness of her appearance had become encroached upon and changed with this winter of the city, of multiplied interruptions and fatigues, of faster unfolding plans and cares. "If mamma and the children only could be got away to a place like Fellaiden this year!" she thought. "I wonder —" and a bright idea seized her. But she could hardly be so bold, in any way, as to approach it just now in her communications with Miss Ammah. The "children," Hortense and Cornelia, who have not had more place in this story simply because, for one thing, France's home-life has had so little place in it, and again, because they two had heretofore so paired off together in their school-going and their associations with their fellows, as the two elders had done in their advanced social life, leaving our France for us to take up, since, as she told us herself at the beginning, she was rather skipped in the family, — these young girls found their way to France now that she was stationary, and began to discover that she was "a good deal jollier than they knew." On her part, she learned something of what she might have to do right here "in the middle," between what had grown up and could not be helped and what was growing up and ought to be helped a great deal. She began to recognize that, merely as a kind of moral breakwater, it might not be in vain and might not have been accidental that she, the odd one, had been so set in the midst.

Mr. Everidge substituted a half-hour in France's room every day for that second occasional cigar. He learned a good deal of her, really, without her knowing it. For one thing, that book of the Great Pyramid — of which you, reader, are perhaps a little tired, but through which such wonderful ideas had come to France — lay on her book-table as she was slowly getting better and was allowed more freedom in occupation. She and

her father came to talking of it. There were absolute verities of life presented there that were tangible, inevasible; founded upon nothing that could be set aside as a myth, a theory, but fixed in the visible laws of things.

Mr. Everidge was greatly interested, though when theory followed fact he was far from ready to go on with it to all its conclusions. But he was surprised to find his little Fran' had managed to get hold of such things.

One day, — I must make rapid points now, for I have told my simple story all too leisurely, unless you grant that the real story is in the slow and gradual things, — Miss Ammah came in with a pocketful of letters and a face full of news. She kept the letters in her pocket for a while, but she could not keep the budget out of her face.

"You look brimful, Miss Ammah," said France. "What has been happening, or is going to?"

"Some things that are brimful choke up with it, and pour slowly. I 'm a long-necked bottle, France. Give me time."

"'All the time there is,'" said France. "But remember it will be time for me to fancy everything conceivable."

And some eagerness, as ill-repressed in the girl's eyes as her own fulness in hers, admonished Miss Tredgold.

"I won't worry you. But, for one thing, I 'm going up to Fellaiden to see the spring come out there, if I can't have the summer, and to furnish my house."

"O Miss Ammah!" France lifted himself up on her elbow upon the low couch where she rested. "Take me with you, Miss Ammah!"

"Well, that is outright. I like that. I 've been waiting for that, — or something. I did n't dare, — but *why*, France?"

"O, I want the country so! Papa is fidgety to get me out to the Place, but mamma has been so snarled up with engagements that she could n't get rid of, and she is so tired, too, herself. And Fellaiden would be so much better!"

"Why, France?" persisted conscience-quickened Miss Ammah, who meant to know what she was about this time. "I don't mean what for, — you need n't say anything you don't want to, — but — "

France helped her out. This gleam of possibility restored to her her old sprightly quickness.

"Just generally why? I'll tell you, Miss Ammah. I want to see how the spring *does* come up there. I want to see how the water comes down from Lodore when all the brooks are full. And I want to see, with my own eyes, other things. Because I had a piece of my life there last summer, you good, dear woman!" And France laid the arm she was not leaning on right across Miss Ammah's knees, and looked up in her face with pure, unafraid eyes.

"I like that," repeated Miss Ammah, putting her hand softly on France's sleeve, and with more yet in her face than she wot of from her heart. "But — I can't say, France. I must have leave all round. And now I've got news to tell you from Fellaiden."

A little blench flittered across those gentle-dauntless eyes. France took her arm off Miss Ammah's knees, and leaned back again. What news could it be?

"And I have a letter for you from Israel Heybrook. He says he wanted to tell you the news himself, you had been so his friend."

Miss Ammah was probing. It seemed cruel to herself, but as a responsible woman she must do it now.

Every vestige of color went out of France's sweet, upturned face, as it had done that day when Miss Ammah had told her at the Berkeley about going off this year to Europe.

There was no need of probing any more. She had found the ball.

Miss Ammah took a handful of letters from her pocket and gave France one.

"You are tired," she said. "I sha'n't talk to you any more now. I'll come again to-morrow, and we'll see about Fellaiden. But I shall give you your claret before I go."

Miss Ammah turned to a pretty little bedroom buffet, and poured out some wine and water, sugared it delicately, and brought it over to the sofa. "You must get stronger if you're to go up the hills," she said.

France smiled a pitiful little smile. "Yes, perhaps I must,"

she said. All the sudden buoyancy had dropped away from her. But she took the wine.

And then Miss Ammah went, — rather in a hurry. She pulled her pocket-handkerchief out the minute she had shut the door behind her, and I think, if the truth were told, she wiped first one eye and then the other all the way down stairs.

France took up the letter. Her name stood in fine, strong script upon the back, — her name, in Israel Heybrook's handwriting.

The letter was not sealed. Had Miss Ammah read it, then? Had he meant she should? It could be very little, *especially*, after all, to herself, then. Or — but of course, there could be nothing in it that could make it much — so much that — What folly of nonsense was she thinking?

There could be but one piece of news, she supposed, that Rael would write about so signally. And she had at any rate to read the letter.

It could be no worse after than now. Worse? Had she not to be *glad* for Rael? Was she not his friend, — promised for "always"?

So she drew out the little sheet from the envelope. She remembered, as she did so, how she had received and treated that one note that Mr. Kingsworth had written her. A compunction that she had not then been capable of smote through her. Oh, she *hoped* good Mr. Kingsworth was quite happy now! And she wondered — all in the minute in which she slowly opened the two folds of the letter — how people, after such things, attained to be.

And this was what she read: —

"Dear Miss France, — I should not have troubled you with any little thing about myself, though I have never forgotten that you said you would be my friend, and that you listened so kindly to all my plans, and that which I had to think about when you were here. But something has happened to me — to us all — now, which makes me feel that I can take the liberty of writing; that it belongs to you to hear from me what so happily concerns us.

"Miss Ammah will have told you —"

France stopped here in her reading, partly puzzled, partly shrinking to go further.

Miss Ammah had told her nothing; and something had happened to them *all.*

Well, would it not be to all, — this happiness, that she knew she was afraid was the happening to Rael? She was resolutely blind to each succeeding line; she would not *glance* over this letter. It should come to her as it must, and it had all got to be read; so she lifted it up again.

"Miss Ammah will have told you that my uncle, Deacon Ambrose Newell, died ten days ago. He was only sick a week. Miss France, I will never blame any one, I think, again. I have been despising poor Uncle Amb all my life, and now the nobleness has got free in him at the very end, and he has done everything that he should do by us. And I could n't forgive Sarell for making her wedding gowns and leaving my mother as she did, when it turns out she took that time for it that she might keep Hollis on at the Hollow, and be there herself to do just what she has done, — save my old uncle's soul, and bring back our rights to us. It is all her doing — I mean, that it was in time; for Uncle Amb had it in his heart always, only *kept put away*, as he kept everything.

"To tell you the whole story, you will be glad to know that we are richer by full ten thousand dollars. Of course, we don't mean to take anything from the widow from the sale of stock, &c.

"And now, Miss France, I *can* choose. And I want to tell you that my choice is just the same, and for the same reasons, that it was the day I told you all about it on Crowned Head. I see a life here that I think I can live, and that there are not many people *to* live. Perhaps it never has been tried just as I mean to try it. I mean to get, and grow into, as fast as I can, the very best that books and thinking, which are the ways of the going of truth through the world, can give me; and I mean to put it all into every particular of this simple everyday doing up here, at the first sources of things that men work for, — daily bread. I think it *may* be the honestest, grandest life a

man can live, and help show others how to live. And Mr. Kingsworth thinks so too.

"This is all my news; if you still care for it, it is reason enough for my letter. I have no right to tell you any more of myself; but I will say that there is nothing in me that has not been made better — yes, and happier — because I have known such as you.

"I am very thankfully and truly your friend,

"Israel Welcome Heybrook."

"Such as." How much did those two words mean? In them lay all the possibility of a sting to France in this manly letter that she was proud of, and of course she stung herself with them.

If she had only known how determined an effort it had cost him to put them in!

CHAPTER XLVI.

"THOSE DOZEN YEARS OF OURS."

THE next day was Saturday, — the home day. Miss Ammah came to early dinner, and invited herself afterward into Mr. Everidge's smoking-room. Miss Ammah made her own opportunities. "I want to talk to you, George," she said. And when they were cosily seated, — the one with match-box and ash-tray beside him, and the twisted leaf in his mouth, which he began to spiritualize into white wreaths and rings of cloudy fragrance, and the other with a knitting-basket of softly dropped, snowy wool, which was being frothed up by the play of her needles with its cobweb thread into something almost as vapory, — she began.

The window was wide open to-day, and the room was full of broad, long, afternoon sunlight.

"You 'll get out of town next week, then." It had been said so at the dinner-table. France had been there, but she had gone back to the quiet of her own room again.

"Yes. It 's high time. High time for everybody else, as well as for poor Fran'. How is the child coming on, do you think?"

"Better. She only wants a change."

"Yes. She has her long drive out of town every day now; but that is not enough. She must ride out, and not come back again."

"What I think is, that it would be good for her to go off and not come back again till you are all settled. The bustle and upset will be just what she can't bear."

"I know. But I don't know of any way that it could be managed."

"I do. I never say 'ought,' if I can help it, without knowing where the 'can' is."

"Of course not. You 're the canniest person I ever met with. Very well."

"I 'm going up to Fellaiden next week.. The paper-hanger and the carpet-man have just come down, and a car-load of furniture has just gone up. I 'm going to straighten my house, to come back to in September. Fran' could be quiet, out of all *my* turmoil, at the farmhouse. Of course, I should be there, too, until — in a few days, I guess — I could warm up, and she could come to me. Would you let her go?"

"If what?"

"If I asked her. It 's fair to say that she has asked me, already. What I want is leave to ask her."

"You mean something, Ammah. What made her ask you?"

"That 's just what I won't be responsible for. I don't want you to trust her to *me*. If you like Fellaiden for her, I 'll take her, and be thankful to. That 's all."

The corners of Mr. Everidge's lips and eyebrows dropped just a little. I think a man always resents the first notion that his daughter can care for any man.

"If you mean that young preacher," he said, with a slight protesting effort, "Fran' is n't the girl to — "

"Run after anybody. I know that," said Miss Ammah, quickly. "But she 's just the girl to give herself no peace till she finds out the truth of things, and whether she 's been making a mistake — that would be more than a mistake for one."

"You think she has made a mistake?"

"I 'm pretty sure of it. But — now don't jump at me, George Everidge, or tip anything over. I *don't* think it 's about the minister."

Mr. Everidge did not tip over anything; but he tipped the wrong end of his cigar against the ash-tray, and came very near putting the other, not the right one, into his mouth. It was on the way there, apparently, but hindered by the impossibility to him of resuming his smoke till this startling woman had been more explicit. He got so far, intending to be quite cool and unapprehensive, while he looked at his companion for an an-

swer to his immediate, and not altogether calm "What on earth, then? Who? I don't understand you, Ammah!"

"Understanding is just about the last thing people do do," returned Miss Ammah. "If we could do that, there would n't be any need of going through the world at all. But to make anybody *else* understand, — no, I don't really expect to. Only just, — if you 'd wait till you do, and then make up your own mind, for I don't want to be trusted!"

"I don't believe you 'd better be! How am I to come at anything, if there 's anything to come at?" interjected Mr. Everidge, with an impatience impatient at itself.

"Turn your cigar round, George," admonished Miss Ammah. "France got a letter from Fellaiden, yesterday. I don't know a word that 's in it; but I 'll venture to say she 'll show it to you if you ask her, and that there 'll be something in it that 'll say for itself. But it was before the letter that she asked me. And one thing — children come to a time when they 've their lives to live for themselves; we are apt to forget that, and France — yes, I think she is a grown woman, now; which half the girls are n't, and never come to."

There was a letter of France's own, which Mr. Everidge recollected at these words, lying close under his elbow in a drawer in his writing-table, — a letter which, when his wife had shown it to him, one day last summer, he had taken from her and had put away to keep; in the same drawer was a little pair of shoes that France had first run alone in: they belonged together, he thought. Men do lay by things like that, though they are not commonly credited with such sentiment.

Yes, he remembered very well that France had been peculiar in her running alone. She had not blundered and tumbled into it; she had quietly made up her mind one day that it was time, and she had picked herself up and done it. It was for that he had put the little shoes away. Now — well, perhaps she did see that it was time for her to run alone again. Only, he would stand by if he could, and take care there should be nothing too dangerous in her way.

"I 'll go up and see Fran'," he said, dropping his cigar, that had lost its relish, into the scrap-jar.

"Do; and I 'll wait here," answered Miss Ammah.

"I don't know that I shall say anything, or that she will," said Mr. Everidge. There is one half of the human creation, and there may be just another quarter, perhaps, out of the other half, which does n't like to seem to do anything exactly as it is advised.

But Miss Ammah waited. "They both will; and now I can have a clear mind."

"So you think you want to go up to Fellaiden?" Mr. Everidge asked his daughter, a little suddenly, and perhaps on purpose, when he had sat by her, speaking of things indifferent, for about five minutes.

"I want to go very much, papa," France answered him, with that still, brave look in her eyes.

"Do you think you are able?" the question was a slight retreat on his part.

"I think it is the thing for me to do. It is a right way and time. It will make me able."

That word "able" reminded him again. Here was this child of his, with a life before her that she herself had to be able for, not he for her.

"You have heard from your friends up there, Miss Ammah tells me?"

"Yes. But if I had not heard I should have liked to go. They have had some good fortune, papa. I should like to tell them now how glad I am."

"You could write that."

"Yes, but I want to see how glad they are. I want to see some other things. I got into their story, last summer, papa."

"Fran', has it anything to do with those dozen years of mine?"

A swift blush ran up into her face. But she looked brave, in all sweet modesty, still; and she caught up her weapons.

"How can I tell what anything might have to do with those dozen years of ours, papa? But not *that*, not a bit," she said; and for the first moment it occurred to her that she could n't go to Fellaiden without some touching, by her very presence, of that other chapter of the story.

"Only, what we all want is the very truth," her own courageous purpose enabled her to answer for Bernard Kingsworth. She was going for the truth, and to be true. Nobody need be afraid of that.

While she thought of it so, her father was thinking of "those dozen years of ours." Would they be "ours" if he were a separating power between France and anything that might actually belong to her in those years? And might n't they be theirs together, whatever they might bring, if it could only be received — but how could it if it were this, the only thing that he could think of?

It was not strange that Mr. Everidge revolted at this but-half-understood possibility. The remarkable thing thus far was that he could tolerate for an instant the consideration of such a possibility at all. Nothing but the sort of girl that he saw in every line and look, and heard in every word and tone, his France to be, could have held his absolute counter-dictation in suspense before it. Nothing but that, although his estimate of Miss Tredgold was such that, whether she would be trusted or not, he would always think twice before he ran blindly against anything that she had even remotely furthered.

Nothing but that, although it was no thanks to him, he felt, that it had come to be so with his Fran'. He only realized, as we do when we have brought all our children up, that by that time there is either little use or little need of interference.

"Papa, I should like to have you see this letter." France held it out to him from her little work-basket.

Mr. Everidge, but for this act of hers, would have been hard bestead how next or further to proceed. When she had said, "Not *that*, not a bit," to interrogate, "What was it, then?" and to ask for what somebody up there had written to her, — I think Mr. Everidge would have left the room and gone down and trusted Miss Ammah by force with the whole affair, before he would have done that.

But here was his Fran' again! Truly, between two right-minded persons, neither has ever to do the whole of a right thing.

He took it, and read it through. He had not forgotten

Israel Heybrook, the young man who had said it was "hard to shoot over a man's head, if you once got it lifted up," and that "a man's measure, in some things, is made to be about the same."

Every word of this letter was the word of a man whose head *had* got lifted up; every word was according to the measure of such a man. There was nothing mean or unformed in the very handwriting.

Miss Ammah had done well to venture to say, without having read a syllable of it, that a letter from such a man would speak for itself. And how well she must have known him, too, and this measure of him, to be sure of that! Mr. Everidge thought of what he *had* consented to, — of little Sampson Kaynard, who was his son-in-law.

When he placed the sheet in the envelope again, and gave it back to his daughter, he said, — and insensibly he took the tone of dealing now as with any possible, credible thing, — "I should like just to ask, — has Mr. Heybrook ever spoken to you of anything *more* than friendship?"

The color was high again, but the eyes were steady and the voice was clear. "No, never, papa. He has only spoken so of my being his friend as if — But I will tell you, papa. I have not a thought in my mind that I would not be glad you should see, if you could see it without any telling at all. He would not have said such a thing then. He would not have thought it was right; and I don't know as he would ever. It is n't that *part* of it, papa. I wish I could make you see, because he may be going to say it to quite another person now; but I did this: I made him feel, feeling it myself, that there was a great difference between us; and so there is," she said, with a sudden superb humility, "and I want — just once — to let him see that the difference is up, and not down, from me, and that I know it. I 'm very proud, papa; you need n't think I would n't be; but I 'm too proud to let that slight stay, — there. And I want things, whatever they are, to be true. People do stand so mean and helpless sometimes, and let them slip away into untrueness."

George Everidge, getting up to go, stood there wondering inwardly, how it had happened to him, with his careless train-

ing, to find, where he had but had a little child beside him, running alone, all at once a grand girl like this coming to him, frank and daughterly, with what was in her heart, as if he had been grand altogether, too. "I stand for it to her," was his solution to himself afterward. "She is a perfect *child*, and takes a perfect father for granted."

Verily, there are many things in which we can only represent that which was thought of for us when we were made in the image of the Heavenly!

All Mr. Everidge did, just then and there, was to kiss France, and tell her she was a good girl.

Downstairs, after sitting half an hour with Miss Tredgold and a newspaper, without the least civility of attention to either, he said to the lady, "I'll take her off your hands, Ammah. I'll trust *herself*. But I'm doing the most extraordinary things lately! Do you think I am quite fit to be kept out of Somerville?"

Perhaps France, in her capacity for nobleness, and also in her occasionally odd style of giving way to it, was not altogether so unaccountable, as her father's child.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHIMES.

It is Sunday again, the Day of Light. Shall we skip the Sun Day?

It is Easter Sunday, the Day of the Light of Life; of the coming of the glory of the Lord by the way of the East. Shall we skip the Easter Sun Day?

Of all the pauses which the recurring rest makes in our common living and action, the sweetest, I think, is when it comes between a plan or decision of a doing that we greatly desire and that is good for us, and the doing itself, or between the good news of something and the fulfilling of the news. It is a rest of certainty and anticipation, in which the thought and hope come gladly again and again to us. It is a rest we should not take for ourselves in our eagerness, but of which we find the tenderness of the providing.

This was such a day to Frances Everidge.

She was to go in three days more, in this lovely early springtime, in a quite right and natural way, and with her whole body and spirit craving together the rightness and the help of it, — to Fellaiden among the hills.

That it was open to her, that there was nothing between her and it forbidding her to go, — as her very consciousness of need seemed forbidding her when her one link and chance had been about to be removed, and the great, whole year to be growing on, as other years, maybe, would follow and grow, between her and that piece of her life that she would only have lived as a fragment, to be broken quite off and cast away, — this was a great lifting.

It was a showing to her that nothing is cast away and done with, that the lines and colors once let in reappear in the pattern

and make it out; that life is not a "crazy wrap," made of odds and ends, some of which God has no more left of. The bright, soft rug, in which even the odds and ends were managed with a method, that she drew up over her feet upon the sofa where she settled herself with her books, made her think of this.

Everything made her think of everything hopeful. One thing was sure: she was going to know the truth, and the truth would make her free. Nothing would be slipping away from her, or from anybody, for want of knowing; then she thought she could have courage to live her life on, because she would be certain that it was her life.

She had brought down with her the two books that she was most interested just now to think into, — her Bible, and the Prayer Book that she had not been brought up by, but which she had come to use of late through mere circumstance to follow the worship in the church she had been attending. She was discovering meanings in it that have been perhaps much covered up in the church by the very ritual of them, and which by rediscovery are so freshly beautiful. She was reading it as she had read that other book about the wonder in stone. Here was a wonder of some life that had been in the world, grown from the beginning of the New Testament, and the heart of which, whatever the superpositions might be, was the heart and secret of that.

She wondered if the little children would sing "O all ye works of the Lord," to-day.

Her father looked in just before he went out with his wife to the morning service. "So you are here, little Fran'? Morris is in. Ring, if you want anything. Is that conservatory window too much for you?"

"Not a bit, papa; everything is east to-day *but* the wind."

Mr. Everidge glanced at the book in her hand. "You are getting to be quite a little churchwoman," he said; and it did not sound exactly as a careless, passing remark.

"I don't know, papa. I don't know very much about the church. But there are things that I am glad have been left in the world till I could find them. I think some great thing — that ought to take us all in — must have been keeping in *the midst* of the churches, somewhere!"

The King's Chamber, sealed up in the heart of the Building.

Mr. Everidge stooped down and kissed her. "If you find your way into it, hold up your torch for me. Don't vanish in, away from me!" and still his word, that wore a playfulness, was not just playful. And then France was left alone.

The wind came in softly from the south over the heads of the blossoms. On it floated the Easter chimes, — Easter chimes and Easter incense. The churches would be full of flowers and fragrance to-day.

The bells played Coronation. The slow, sweet strokes rang forth the melody, drop by drop.

"Bring forth the royal diadem, and crown him Lord of all!"

The memory of the words drifted in with the joyous notes.

Crowned King. He who had come Conqueror out of the land of the enemy; His garments dyed red with the wounds of battle; King of the whole earth: did not the triumphant Easter peal say that?

Was not that the whole of it? Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And the Jews were the *Hebrew* people, the people who had come forth from beyond the Euphrates, the people who should fill up the real Jerusalem.

"Israel:" the Priests and the Servants, and the Spirits and Souls of all the Righteous; the holy and humble Men of Heart. What a beautiful name-word that *Israel* was! she was glad to think that her friend, being what he was, should bear it.

And so her thoughts came round to, as they kept hovering toward, Fellaiden among the hills.

This work here, that she had just begun upon? These poor ones, whose hills were difficulties, who could get away to no Fellaiden? She had not forgotten them. She was not tired of them. But what she was really to do about them, — was there nothing that should tell her that, more rightly than the mere impulse to escape from her own tangle by an impetuous pull at the grand snarl of the world? The King of the world, would He not tell her that? She had brought His words down here to-day to see.

The words, alive, came forth to meet her. Before she called, the answer, as it does out of that word, planted in us insensibly since this world has become Christendom, began to utter itself.

There was a story there. The story of a man who, as he journeyed. — *As he journeyed!* was the King careful to say it so?

In the way of each of us, as we go, the errand lies, then? Does the King order that also?

In all the crisscross of the world, if everybody found his way by that leading and sending, if every man "stood in his place," would the service be prepared?

Was there not something about the mote and the beam that might be true, in some way, of that? Can we begin to struggle with everything that is a hindrance and out of place, can we set every least thing, the crowd and mass of least things, straight, when we ourselves are not where we were meant to be; are not straight with the sun? Must we "orient" our own life first? not get everything as we *want* it, — oh no! but everything, as it comes, according to that which is most real and true? Then, in the door of our tent, will the angels of opportunity appear? and will the pillar of the Lord stand before our sight, and His "presence go with us, and give us rest"?

Is it that the kingdom of heaven cannot, after all, be taken by violence; but must it come, first, in some still, sweet, sunshiny way?

This was the Easter sermon that Something, — the winds of God, — preached tenderly to God's child, that springtide day.

And an errand which she was straightway to do came to her to be done.

Philip Merriweather walked round from church to call and see her. Miss Tredgold had told him that she was going away with her.

"How sweet you are!" he exclaimed, coming in among the breath of the flowers, in the warm light and the gently stirring air.

France laughed. "It is sweet to be sweetly surrounded," she said.

"Some people surround themselves," said the boy. "So

you 're going up to Fellaiden? There 'll be sweetness there, again!"

"Yes. The springtime is everywhere, now, Phil. They say the early weather has really come for good. And how lovely it will be, among the brooks and the young grass, and the mountain-tops turning soft again!"

A longing look came into the face of the boy of the mountains. "Think of old Thumble," he said. "You don't know how he *does* look in the springtime, Miss France! With just that little gray cloud of the live-looking trees, before they actually bud out, feathering up along his sides! and how the water sings away underneath! It 's like the Chant; and then, too, — oh, I did n't half know what, or who *was* there, when I was!" he broke off, with a splendid ambiguity that was unconsciously quite worthy of his Fellaiden days. But France did not take that up.

"Men of heart," she said quietly. "Yes, there are those there, too."

"There is one fool less there, now, at any rate," said Phil, lashing himself.

"Perhaps, if any little foolishness has seen its folly, there is one less in the world," said France. "And one more of the others possible to be."

"Don't set me up. Keep on setting me down; it 's better for me," said Phil. "Think of how I undertook to bleat up in that man's face, and thought I was roaring; and yet, I don't know much better about it all, now. I just know that I *don't* know."

He took up the little Bible, probably quite mechanically, that lay there by his hand.

"We just know Who *does* know," said France, full, without thinking about being so, of the message that had been breathed into her.

"You 're further than I am," said the boy. "*How* do we know that? That 's the corner we 're driven into."

"Because there it is," said the girl. "In your own hands."

"*All* of this? Whales and all? I 'm not cavilling now. But what part? how much of it do you *feel sure* of? Not

believe; because people believe lots that they 're not sure of. I honestly want to know."

"I feel sure of every word the Person whose story is in the short half of that Book has said."

"You 've got to believe about Him, first," said Philip.

"I believe every word He says about Himself," said France.

"But that 's the circle of it. What if He never was at all? I 'm *not* scoffing."

"I know you 're not."

"But they say, you know, that it might have been all imagined, as the best sort of thing to be?" The question of his tone was a great deal more in earnest than the assertion of his words.

"It would have taken," France answered slowly, as if something she was bound to say, "a Jesus Christ to invent a Jesus Christ. So, by that story being there, He is proved to be *somewhere*, is n't He?"

"But then, — suppose, — He might have been mistaken, or misreported, in some things? Those were queer, ignorant times, — the times of that story."

"*These* are queer, ignorant times," said France, "only with bigger things to be ignorant about. We want just what they wanted then, to understand with. And the *understanding* was all He said anything about. And Phil, God would n't have let a lie or a mistake about the way of that understanding live so long — as the very best thing — in the world. You 've got to give it all up, if you give up this. Besides, when the daylight comes, you don't have to argue about it, by the clock and by dead-reckoning. You *see* it."

"I see *you* see. So perhaps I shall, as we both have human eyes."

"*That 's* a good deal to see," said France, smiling. "I suppose that is what has really come down all the way from the Apostles."

"Miss France, I must go off, now. No, I sha' n't stay to lunch, to-day. I only came in for a minute, to say good-by, and I want you to give a message for me up in Fellaiden."

"Of course I will," said France.

"I want you to beg pardon, for me, of Mr. Kingsworth," said Phil Merriweather, manly-fashion. "And tell him a little of the fool is getting shaken out of me."

France sat up and held out her hand. "You are not *Flip* any longer," she said.

"You can't make any very grand kind of Old Testament re-christening for me," said Phil, laughing. "'Philip' is nothing but 'a lover of horses,' after all."

"A lover of things strong and noble, that help us bear our burdens and take us where we could n't go of ourselves," said France. "Philip is all that, then."

"If I ever do drive a full team," said Phil,—"but I hate making speeches!" And without any further speech at all, only with a great grasp of her hand, he went away.

As he went out he met the two young girls, Hortense and Cornelia. "Is France in the evening-room?" they asked, and hurried in to tell their sister all about the Easter flowers,—and perhaps, too, not a little about the Easter bonnets.

They were a good deal with France in these days; so Philip Merriweather had come to know them more of late, in ways that I have not had space to tell you of; curiously happening, since they were really so much nearer his age and tone, one would say, than she.

"How like Hortense is growing to Miss France,—or *after* her!" Phil thought as he went down stairs. "We need n't any of us think to catch up with her; we have n't started soon enough!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

OUTSIDE, WITH A DARK LANTERN.

France had written back to Israel:—

"I thank you very much, dear Mr. Israel, for writing me your news yourself. You say about it just what I should have expected. I should have known you would not change your mind, for that was made up on grounds and reasons quite different from what money has to do with. But I am so glad you have also got the money!

"I have not been quite well lately. After Fellaiden, the city has not been very good for me,— or *to* me, some way. Miss Ammah is coming up to her house, and they are going to let me come with her, if she gets leave from your mother. For I suppose we should have to trouble her a little. They are sending me for Fellaiden air; but what I am coming for is to see Fellaiden friends, and to be glad with them.

"I am very sincerely yours,

"Frances Everidge."

That was her defence,— that bold front of purpose, shunning nothing. She was coming because she wanted to come back among her friends, and be part with them in the new things; not content to belong only to the past, the old,— though it was the past and the old of only last year.

Perhaps it was just a little puzzling to Israel, whether he should comfort or torment himself with these words. The words were sweetly gracious; but the graciousness of *saying* them? Would he not rather that it should have been less frankly possible?

If he, in his turn, could have understood just how strong a

motive for hiding herself had forced her to putting the frankness in!

Miss Ammah had gone straight home on the Friday,— not waiting for the Saturday's peradventure of decision,— and written to Mother Heybrook, asking if she *might* bring France Everidge with her, if she could get her? So France knew that the Monday would bring the reply. But if anybody had ever waited to be happy until made sure that Mother Heybrook would not forbid it, it would have been a holding of breath for fear of the free air giving out.

Wednesday was the sweetest of April days,— the sweetest, at any rate, there had been yet this year. Lyman met them at Creddle's Mills, with the light open wagon. Two chair-backs, — comfortable old curves,— sawed from the lower frames and set in staples, with thick rugs thrown over them, had been added to the back seat; these made the vehicle perfect. Farmer-folk do not wait to get new equipages, any more than to build new houses; they add and incorporate new comforts with the old, in homely, clever ways. All the open wagon had ever wanted it had now; it was a luxurious turnout.

"Beautif'l weather — overhead!" somebody called to Lyman in highway greeting, as they came out from the town streets of the Mills, and took the long, straight north road under the hill-foot.

"Yes, only there ain't many of us travellin' that way, exactly!" responded Lyman, as his wheels ground heavily out of the rut, and turned great rolls of wet brown earth aside from them. There had been heavy spring rains up here, he told them.

But it was all overhead to France. She was travelling just that way. The blue sky, and the unnamable deliciousness of the air, and the uprising music of running waters,— she was aloft among them, out of all the heavy ruts, going as a bird goes, on its wings, not feet.

And so they came, up the ascents, and along the windings, dipping down into Clark's Hollow, skirting the Long Meadows, and climbing the slow stretch of Three-Mile Hill.

And when they drove up over the soft grass sward of the wide

door-place, there stood Rael Heybrook and his mother in the house-porch.

So easy and quick it had been to get here! so same it all was, waiting. Was it? two pairs of eyes asked the swift question of each other, as Rael took France's hands to help her down over the wagon-side. Asked it under cover. Neither was conscious that they had asked, or quite sure of what they had found.

Israel saw that France was pale. "You are tired with your journey?" he said; and he said it most kindly.

"A little," she answered, and the weariness was reason enough; but under the weariness was the question, "Why could n't *he* have driven over for us, if he cared to,— since he was waiting here?" And there was "a little" gentle sadness in the two words.

She had not come here to be sad, though; the next instant she was telling Mother Heybrook how nice she looked. "In her new dress," she said.

"Bless you, child, 't is n't new! It 's only rested. I pinned it up and laid it by last fall. It was n't wore, but it was kind o' tired. Gowns do get tired; but then, after a spell, they shake out again, 's fresh 's folks."

"*You* shake out fresh, Mrs. Heybrook! Some folks stay in strings, and their gowns too. It 's the live bird that makes the live feathers," said Miss Ammah, who always talked, the first day or so at Fellaiden, as if the mountain air had got a little bit into her head. And so the women went into the house, and the two young men carried the boxes up stairs, and then went off with the horse and wagon into the sheds.

It scarcely seemed as if they were beginning just where they left off, — even where those letters had left off. France supposed some things did not freshen up with laying by. Other things had been fresh and alive, meanwhile; the current had run into them. She had no doubt that at the Parsonage all was quick and circulating. Yesterday and to-day had something to do with each other. Had she to make new yesterdays again?

She was tired,— a good deal tired. She went to bed early; perhaps that there might the sooner be a yesterday.

"It is so good — so like you — to come up here because you were glad for us, Miss France!"

The voice came from behind her. She was out on that old west piazza, in the brave morning air. She turned round, and gave her hand to Israel.

"I never can say things all at once," he went on. "And you were tired last night. But you must not think I had forgotten your good words."

"They were very poor words. They did not say much, I think. How full the brook must be, Mr. Rael! How plainly you can hear it rushing over the rocks down there! Oh, how lovely everything is at Fellaiden!"

She was up on wing again. The morning was in her heart.

Rael had resolved within himself that he would not be a churl, a coward. Because this girl was set so far away from him that it might easily have been that they two should never have drifted toward each other any more, because he had been, within himself, "a fool," had let that get hold of him which could never be helped now, though nobody but himself was to blame for it, he was not going to thrust off or turn away from what had been freely given him, and deserved — yes, the least from her deserved — all that he could give in return.

Only, it should never offend her. He could bear things. He was a man.

Bernard Kingsworth had told him that a man might hope anything that he was capable of hoping. Well, he would hope it, then; but not from her, now. In some heaven it might come true, perhaps, in heavenly fashion. But all the fashions of this world stood between. He would only not reject and overthrow what had begun for him, because it might not reach the utmost in a present fulfilment. He would be that far capable of it, that far worthy that it had begun.

Rael even said to himself sometimes — there had been times and times in the few days since the coming of her letter — that it might be Bernard Kingsworth, in the gradual unfolding of his character to her understanding, that she was, half unconsciously, turning back for. He remembered that "measure" in which, at their very first meeting here, he had discerned

them related. "The things that are, will come true," he said. "And I can bear it."

Here were two that could bear, two that stood ready for the everlasting right to befall, though their heaven should roll together as a scroll.

Why, as Miss Ammah had said, should one woman have the love of two such men?

Yet could either of them be hurt by it?

"Tell me about all these things," said France to Israel. "I am behind with the story, and I want to come into it again." She sat down on the long red rocker. Israel drew nearer, but he did not sit down; he stood and leaned against the piazza-rail before her, and he told her all about the things that had happened.

"Why, Sarell is a grand woman!" she said. "I would like to have been Sarell — to do a thing like that!"

But I am afraid my France, much as I like and believe in her, could not have done just what Sarell had done. Why should I say "afraid," though? For her, there would have been something yet truer and higher; something she could not have done violence to and been true or high. Sarell had done no violence: she had simply known what might be and what might not; she had accepted her own humble lot and way, and had done her good work "as she journeyed."

"What is she to do now?" asked France.

"We have helped Hollis about hiring the East Hollow Farm; the widow and her mother have been moved away, already. Sarell is mistress there; and Hollis will do well."

"What does Sarell say?"

"She asks, as you did, what she is to do next. Life has become so easy to her, all of a sudden, that she scarcely knows how to take it. She likes books, you know. Hollis brings her one, every week or two, from the library at Reade, and she gets ours from the Centre. She used to keep one by to look at weekdays and read Sundays, she said. One of those first days when the sugaring was done, and before any busy spring work began, I was over there; and Hollis had just come in with the 'Lass o' Lowrie's.' She looked at it, and thanked him, said she was real glad to get it, and laid it down without opening it.

'I wonder what I 'd best turn to, now,' she says, looking round for a 'chore.' 'Why, that,' said Hollis. 'Set right down an' read it.' '*That?*' says Sarell. 'Right away, fust minute? Why, I donno how!' That 's the way her life looks to her, the 'hindrances all dropped out.' 'Don't seem 's ef I c'd git along 'thout a hindrance,' she says."

"That 's a good story! That 's just like Sarell!" and Rael and France both laughed out gayly. It was such a gay, sweet thing to be merry together!

"And Lyman?" asked France.

"Lyman is studying on with Mr. Kingsworth. He has been with him almost all winter."

"Yes, Miss Ammah told me. That 's good."

"He will keep on, as well as the farm-work will let him — for Lyme won't drop the plough and hoe-handles so long as he lives at home — until next year; then Mr. Kingsworth thinks he can stand a college examination. I must tell you that Mr. Kingsworth has got the better of me: he has put it to me that it won't be 'generous' for me not to let him do this that he has begun for Lyman. And Lyman is to be his student all the way through. I was too proud for it, at first; but he ended by making me feel too proud to be mean. It 's easier now, though, that I *could* do it myself."

"You are a great deal too proud, Mr. Israel."

"I must be too proud to let that boy drive the plough off alone, while I stand pleasuring here," said Rael suddenly.

He was in his dark gray woollen shirt and working trousers, trim and neat, — Rael was always that, — but coarse and plain, ready for his ploughing; he went off with a smile, and France followed him with one.

All day, one word from each remained with either. France had told him he was "too proud"; he had been "pleasuring" while he talked with her.

Well, — the evening and the morning had been the first day.

. . . . . .

Mr. Kingsworth drove over with his sister, Leonora.

It was an easy way of coming again, the first time. These

two young women ought to know each other; and it was good that the visit could have a point like that.

Now, each of these two girls had something to investigate as to the other. Bernard had never said a word to his sister of the last summer as a personal experience, but he had said a great deal of this France Everidge. Perhaps he had been teaching himself to be able to talk about her freely. However, Leonora had certainly conceived a strong desire to see this France, and to see her with her brother. On the other part, we know very well what the meeting was to France.

Two women, set to gauge and comprehend each other, are apt to do one of two things; possibly, between them, each of two things: either to comprehend and measure straight through and through, and thenceforward to need nothing that words can tell, — or to strike a false trail, and comprehend with equal facility something that it will take a great deal of logic, of word or of event, to substitute with simple truth.

In this case, there occurred the double illustration of my theory.

Leonora Kingsworth saw, like a seeress, that Miss Everidge was — or must have been, a very little while ago — precisely the person to charm and win Bernard, curate of souls, as a fair, rich, noble upland, never brought under plough, or sown with seed of purpose, but sending up its life in every growth that springs spontaneous where grandest harvest is possible, wins the longing of eye and hand from the man to whose love and wisdom for earth-culture its possibility stands for present fact. She saw clearly and truly that France had been a study and a revelation — a quickly absorbing delight and hope, very likely well-nigh a life-dream and passion — to her brother. But she did not believe her to have been so beside him that she could have dwelt with him on the heights. Therefore, she did not believe that she would, or could, concern his whole, livelong life. Whether she saw already something else that should be, I am not so sure; but she had known Rael long enough, now, not to have that first apparent incongruity to get over; and if she did catch a glimpse, it would not have been a hard thing for her to receive the idea into her mind.

France Everidge, with all her brightness, used it as a dark lantern, and threw all the light only on one side.

Miss Kingsworth was beautiful, more beautiful than anybody she had ever seen. And Rael Heybrook so discerned and loved all beauty! His eyes were upon her admiringly; the eyes of everybody had to be, where she was. It would be as possible not to look into those lovely colors of the sunset, as they sat there before the play and glory of them, as not to watch the exquisite lights and expressions upon that exquisite face. And the illumination came as truly from a sun-shining that was below the earth-surface.

Miss Kingsworth had grown to be his friend in a score of ways that she, France, had not had time or opening for. She turned to him now, with half a dozen questions that he could answer best. Yes; they were great friends and co-workers. France felt small, inadequate, overwhelmed.

There was something in Leonora's manner that bespoke it to have been so from the first. It had not taken time for her to find out Israel, — to comprehend how this young farmer-gentleman could be. She, herself, had used up a whole summer-time in coming to her full conclusion. Leonora Kingsworth had begun where she left off, and had had all this beautiful, long winter. Of course, this had long outgrown the other.

Israel was large and loyal. He had withdrawn nothing from herself; nothing that she had not tacitly bidden him withdraw. But she had had the gift held out to her, and she had let it pass by. She was only, very quietly, secondarily now, his friend. That word of the other morning sounded light and partial to-day, — as of small, different regard, — his "pleasuring" in talk with her. It had been said too easily. It reached for too little. With this other girl, the talk reached around and into all that was making up their life.

She had to sit and hear it, and be pleased and interested about it. She had to be appealed to, and to give information. Of course, she knew all about the "Children's Country Holiday," — that lovely charity of her Boston people. And France had to be glad that she just did know Mr. Devereux Hartie and Mrs. Kellis Waite, and had been on a Correspondence Committee for a little while in the good work.

They were going to set up a holiday house here in Fellaiden, — an old, relinquished parsonage, that stood on the brink of that beautiful North Basin, with sweet pastures running down behind toward the east. "They are full of wild fruit all summer," Leonora said, — she had found out all about the summer too, — "and we are going to make it self-supporting on the strength of it. Do you remember Mrs. Pettrell, Miss Everidge?"

"The one whom Lyman used to call the Stormy Petrel?" asked France, smiling, and giving her fox a pinch under her mantle. "Who used to come here with 'a basket of berries and a grievance,' every few days?"

"I believe she has been simply always driven *before* a storm, Miss Everidge; I don't think she was the making of it, any more than the Mother Carey's chicken. Things — and people — have dealt hardly with her. Some lives do seem to run in such a vein. But you ought to see her with a little child! — She lost three in one week, when she wasyoung."

"Oh!" said France pitifully. And the fox lay quiet, while her heart beat in real, ready sympathy for this other, — this old woman, and her grievous wound of long ago. "And you are going to put her — "

"At the head of Huckleberry House," said Leonora. "That is what we have named it. And the children are to earn — and have — their holiday in the fruit-picking. Mrs. Pettrell is great at 'sealing up.' She will can cartloads in the course of the season, one thing after another, and make jams and cordials. Bernard has provided a market for the things. — Mr. Rael, we had better go over and look at that old sugar-house, I think, and see about putting up a new boiler in it."

This was the other end of the city labor, the beautiful country end, — the end she might —. Yes, though she would not finish the sentence, there had been two ways in which she might have been set at the heart of it.

But she had let it go. She was standing outside; she was only here, looking on, for a few days; it was all over, now.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ROSE-GLORIES.

Miss Ammah's house was dressed like a child whose things have all been laid out beforehand.

The pretty mattings — the bright blue and white in the southwest room, and the red in the north, with the plain, smooth, finewhite in the parlors, and the tile-painted oil-cloth in the plant-gallery between — were all down; the simple curtains, with their light rods and rings, prepared and sent up from Boston, were all hung; furniture, books, and a few pictures were quickly put into their places; the china was unpacked and ranged in the quaintest, most charming corner-cupboards and upon the Eastlake dresser-shelves, built here before Sir Charles Eastlake — or his shelves, at any rate — were heard of on this side the water; and the high-post bedsteads, with new testers and valances, their twisted pillars and brass top-knobs glittering with dark polish and bright burnish, were made up to sleep in.

At the end of a week, a tea-table was set in the sashed gallery, and Miss Ammah and France were established to stay, expecting the Heybrooks and the Kingsworths over to the house-warming. Sarell and Hollis, with a young sister of Mr. Bassett's who was to be house-maiden, were in the pleasant kitchen. Mr. and Mrs. Bassett were invited guests; but Sarell had set a second table here. "There must alwers be two ends to a house," she said. "We 'll warm this end, and I 'll wait on table." To all remonstrance she simply remarked that "she 'd alwers ben one o' them th't hed a place f'r everything, an' everything in its place; an' she found it answered."

It was impossible to let one's self be unhappy at such a time, even if the days that had intervened had given nothing in the

balance against that wilful outweighing of herself that France had achieved. Also, though we may say, "It is all over!" it never is, so long as anything remains to be over with.

There were brackets against the window-frames in the gallery, where pots of plants were to be; meanwhile, to-night, bowls heaped and hung over with pinkest arbutus-blooms and trailing mitchella and young-sprouted feathers of fern filled the rings; and a tall jar in one corner was gay with different tints of early tree-buds and leafage, and the golden disks of bold, impatient little dandelions. On the table were glass troughs among the dishes, with carnations and heliotropes from the small parsonage greenhouse.

France had on a dress of soft white woollen, with bands of green silk trimming, and hair and breast knots of rosy arbutus and glossy wintergreen leaves and light-drooping mitchella. Leonora Kingsworth was in silk of sunny brown, her favorite color, with creamy tea-rosebuds for adornment. Here, in the country, one does not, happily, tire of tea-rosebuds.

When these two came in together from the taking off of Leonora's hat and wraps and a bright little visit and "kank" with Sarell in the kitchen, the metamorphosis of the old Gilley house was complete in the highest point, the human.

And there is nothing like a tea-table, with bright, pleased, friendly people round it, for bringing the human to its brightest, if not highest climax. Only, I have indulged in details already to the extreme prescribed limit of the Wakefield family-picture. I must beware of a canvas that can't be got out of the place where it has been painted.

Tea had been made early, and the guests were to go early. Farmer and Mother Heybrook must be home when the cows were (Lyman privately told Israel never to mind the milking to-night, he felt just up to the whole of it); Mr. Kingsworth had a meeting at his house later in the evening; and all knew that Miss Tredgold, though heart-festive, was tired, and that France, who had zealously helped her, was yet delicate.

The house had been inspected, as a finished whole, from end to end and from top to bottom; and just the like of it, had been declared, was never before seen in Fellaiden.

"But it 's what may be. I had a conscience about that," said Miss Ammah eagerly; "and I hope nobody, if they take a fancy, will be bashful about 'copying.' Unbleached cotton, gray twilled crash, strainer muslin, turkey-red, plain wooden poles, and hollow brass rings at twenty-five cents a dozen, — anybody can have these. It 's the beauty of the new fashions. If only plain people will have plain sense enough to hold on to them when the extravagant ones have grown tired of them for commonness, or have exaggerated them into extravagances. Come back, Rael, after you have seen Mr. Kingsworth and Miss Leonora off. I want a home word with you and France to-night."

Miss Ammah went off to Sarell in the kitchen. France went out to the west doorway, where the maples, that had been scarlet and gold the first time she stood there, were tender with their opening green folds, and the low sun was level through them with a soft glory.

Rael walked down the steep hillside-drive beside the minister's chaise. Leonora leaned from it, speaking earnestly, yet smilingly, with him. France could not know that, although he walked on her side, and his hand was on the frame of the dasher, as if to keep them with him some lingering instants more, it was really the minister who had detained and led him on with last, just recollected words.

He went on as far as the roadway. Then, as the little Morgan turned off and into a brisk trot, he slowly faced about, and, with bent, thoughtful head, retraced his steps.

France, sitting there alone, could not know that he was questioning with himself whether he dared come back to her alone; whether this friendliness, so sweet, so hard, could rightly and manfully go on with him; whether he were strong enough, after all, to bear it.

He knew something of what Miss Ammah's home word was likely to touch upon, to-night. He had had a hint of a possible purpose that would be — it might be, if he could believe that possible — a summer blessedness, — that must be either that or a long summer torture, to him now. "A home word with him and France." That was what had set the keynote to his thoughts. Had it, perhaps, to do with hers also?

Rael stopped when he came up to France upon the doorstone. Something in the girl's look, something her look *recovered* itself swiftly from, struck him. She rose to her feet as he spoke to her.

Miss Ammah was still away in the kitchen. Her voice and Sarell's were high and blithe in conversation.

"You are tired with it all, Miss France?"

"No — yes — perhaps so," she answered a little hurriedly. "The sunset will rest me. It 's going to be beautiful to-night, Mr. Rael." She pointed out along the ridge, straight from the doorway, where, up against the west, fanlike clouds were stretching and spreading in soft, radiating lines of tawny brown. They held themselves over, like the fingers of a hand in benediction.

It was so still and high out there upon the ridge, and the sunset scenery was gathering itself to be such a lovely show!

Yes, just this once more, — as if this once more could tell him something, or end anything.

"Do you feel like walking out there just a little way?"

For answer, France moved across toward the low picket-gate that led out under the maple-tree, upon the open ridge. She did not know how far she would go. Rael came up with her, and they walked silently side by side.

Over their heads, that wonderful sky was lighting up. The clouds were flaky now, the long lines broken into softest scales of vapor, the "mackerel back" that is so incomparable.

But France moved slowly on, her face bent a trifle down. She had a white shawl wrapped round her; and as she held it with her folded arms, she seemed to hold herself apart.

Unexpectedly, she stood still. With a slight movement she threw her head erect. She did not know how clearly attitude and gesture spoke something that she meant to be unspoken.

Rael stopped too. "What is it, Miss France? Will you turn back? Are we going too far?"

They were strange questions to her mood.

If she had not spoken on the instant, she could not have said the words she did. A half breath of hesitation, and they would have been full of a meaning that she would not have uttered for the world. But as she had written that last sen-

tence in her letter, she uttered now, under cover of a frankness too entire to be suspected, the absolute truth.

"I am having a battle with myself. I am trying to be too proud to be mean. I am getting jealous in my friendships, Mr. Rael. That girl is so good and beautiful, and she is so much already among you all! I have admired her till I have grown fierce. There, now you know!" And France laughed, a bitter, brave little laugh against herself.

The flakes of cloud over them were rolled into soft ball-shapes, and the balls were turning rosy. A rose-light was on Israel Heybrook's face.

Could she care like that? Yet what could he assume from it? How could he answer her?

With the outspokenness, her manner changed. She moved forward a step or two, as if some Rubicon were passed, and the way could be taken quietly, as a way quite simply understood.

"I was your friend first, you see," — the "you" might mean again "you all"; but that was a slender shelter, and she did not mark any consciousness by even taking it. She spoke with leisure calm, — "and I have been proud to be. I did not begin as she did. I suppose that is the real comparison and jealousy of it. But I want you to know how proud I have been that I knew you."

Israel paused now, and turned round to her. He answered nothing to all the last part of her saying, but to the first word of it directly.

"You *are* first," he said as calmly as she, but with a great strength in his calmness. "No other friend will ever come before you, Miss France."

"Is that true?" She lifted a glad face full upon him. "Don't answer me. You say it, and I know it is."

"Yes, you know it is true. It is as true as my own soul. And then?" He reached out his hands to her with a sudden boldness. All his manhood asserted itself before this woman to whom he had said, with all the truth and fulness of his soul, that she was first.

"Then, Rael, you are first with me, for always, as you were before I knew it, — before I *would* know it."

All those soft balls of cloud were crimson now, like rich-hearted roses. They seemed to drop and drop, with a fine, misty trail above them in the air, like the trail of rain. The sky was full of falling blooms.

The tender, melting splendor was upon their faces, turned toward each other. They lifted them upward.

"What a sky!" cried France, all joy-transfigured under it.

"It is for us," said Rael. And he put his arm around her, and drew her to his strong, true heart.

"A-world-for-me! A-world-for-thee!"

Did they hear, or did it sing in their souls in the stillness, — that sweet, clear whippoorwill's cry?

The roses of heaven rained and rained, till they had spilled all their crimson mist into floating veils again, and these lifted, and spread away in changing, melting purple, like vanishing robes of angels.

CHAPTER L.

THE BEST WORD.

"I ALWAYS meant it, if this happened. That is, if they would have it so. What else is there for an old life to do, but to join itself to some young ones? That is what I have been after, among the young lives, for years. To find and try them, if haply they would let me, anywhere, join on. Really, not arbitrarily; I was n't going to adopt, and repent. But Rael has been my boy ever since he was a man; and France, well, I don't know how I *should* have managed, if they had n't managed to come together!" Miss Ammah said all this to Mr. Everidge, about her house and her property, and her "plans for sundown," as she said.

Rael and France were to have Rose Ridge; they gave it that name among themselves, from the wonder of that night of their betrothal; and she was to have her home with them, just when, and so much as, she wanted.

"If I get helpless and a burden, it sha'n't be to them," she said. "I would n't be a burden to an own child; for there 's no need of it. There can be house enough and help enough and separateness enough; I 've planned it all. I want to give them whatever *good* there is of me, and I 've made sure I do suit them somehow, old-woman fashion; and they are going to let me share the better and the beautifuller of themselves. I don't see why I should n't have a family," she ended, in France Everidge's own precise words.

They were to be her children; none the less the children of their fathers and mothers that they were to verify those myths of perfection, an old maid's children, also.

Mr. and Mrs. Everidge were to take the place that summer; the suggestion of it had been the home word she had had for

France and for Israel to hear that night. It was France's very own bright idea of a few weeks ago, that she had not dared to speak. Hortense and Cornelia would be up here; Helen with the Kaynards, at Oldwoods, where they, being of the great cousinhood, had rooted near the Bannians.

In the bright, early autumn would be the wedding here; then the house would change hands.

Of course, there was busy talk, down there in Boston, about the odd match. Helen and Euphemia gave it a great air, as well as they could, borrowing largely from France's first letters of last summer, about the "way-off places of the farm," the superbness of the hills, and the majesty of the old maple avenues. You can imagine, perhaps, what they would say.

Israel Heybrook came down for a few weeks among the libraries and the bookshops, and his old professor and student-friends at the Institute. Then France's people saw that she was, at any rate, going to marry a man.

"It won't do for a precedent, though," said an old gentleman, father of daughters, to his friend, Mr. Everidge, at an evening gathering at the Everidge house. France had certain things done carefully after the accustomed order that she could so soon be done with, that no one might suppose her to be in any hiding about it. "It won't do for a precedent. Farmers can't afford to take wives out of our cities, — unless, indeed, the money can be made to pay for what the wife can't be; and that is n't marriage. No, it won't work as a principle."

"I don't know," said Mr. Everidge thoughtfully, "that we could do better with our money, or our daughters, than now and then to return to the soil what originally came from it, and to put back a transplanted living into conditions that the world needs over again every generation or two."

The father of daughters shook his head. "Every ploughman is n't an Israel Heybrook, and every drawing-room girl is n't a Frances Everidge. Those two are odd ones, — but they 've made it even!"

. . . . . .

But the best thing that was said of the marriage was said in the hour that it took place.

It was in the sunny Rose Ridge parlor, of a fair October morning. Mr. and Mrs. Everidge, with their other children, were to take the noon train down to Boston. Miss Ammah was to go with them, and stay a month or two at the Berkeley.

The rooms were open all through, cheery with the first slight touches of winter brightness, that are so pleasant while the glow of summer yet lingers, making pictures of warmth without and within that meet and mingle before the first shiver of real cold has come. Clear little hickory fires were burning on the low hearths, and the rich duskiness of soft rugs, thrown down upon cool mattings and canvas, gave the home-gathering look to cosey centres and corners. The gallery windows were fairly banked with verdure and bloom, through whose perfumed screen the sunlight sifted. Here already were France's own seat and low central table, where she should sit in the winter time that she had so envied of Miss Ammah, with the snows that she had craved to see in their magnificence shining upon the hills, and her husband coming in and out in the joy of the life they would have begun to establish "as it might be," as France had half dreamed it out before she had dared to begin to dream at all.

Bernard Kingsworth married them. He chose to give her so, in the Name in which only he had had strength to give her up.

When her own father and mother had kissed her, Rael took her hand and led her over to his mother, the modest country matron, who might else have waited till her turn and right had passed by.

France put her arms right round her neck.

"Kiss her, mother; she is my wife," said Rael proudly.

Mother Heybrook kissed her. Then she put her back, and looked at her in her young beauty and her simple, pure, white robes. "She 's a great gift, son; but you are — *Israel!*"

The rest of it was in her heart, as it is in the Bible, — "As a prince, thou hast had power with God and man, and hast prevailed."

THE END.

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